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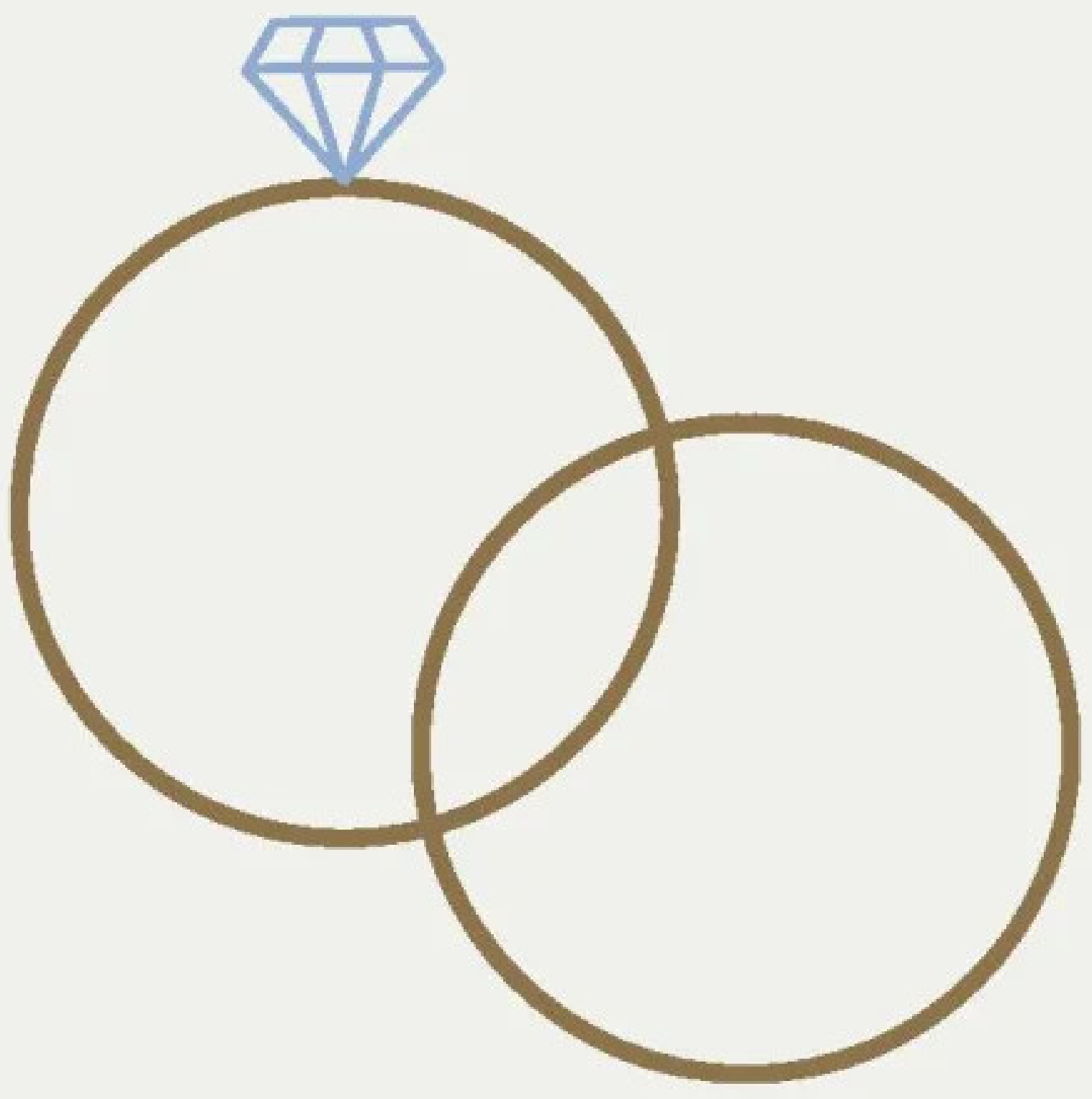
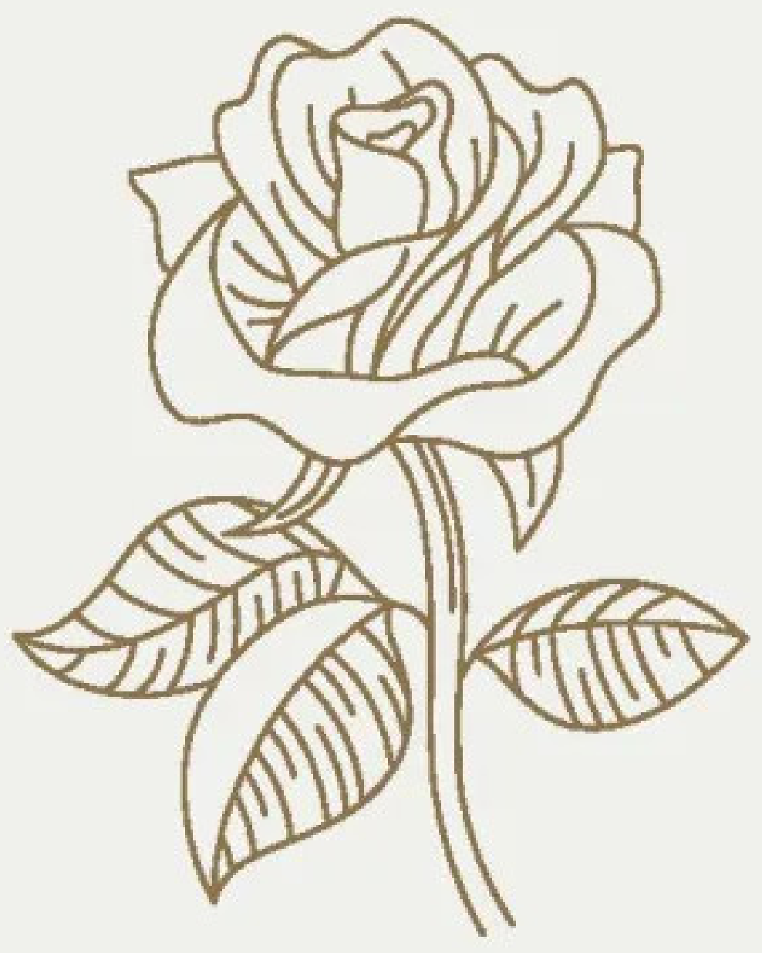


Wedding JOURNAL



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Contents

Intro 8

Section One - *Ideas*

Your partner & you 14
Your priorities 20
Wedding party 22
Make your money go further 26
How should I say 'I do?' 30
Party time 34
Create a mood board 38
Notes 40
To do list 42

Section Two - *Countdown*

Hold the date 46
Countdown calendar 50

Section Three - *Planning*

Supplier & venue search 74
Venue shopping 76
A home away from home 84
Will you marry us? 86
Choosing a photgrapher 90

Every wedding needs a theme 94
Say yes to the dress 98
Bridesmaid dresses 104
Suits for the groom & his men 108
A guide to buying flowers 112
Wedding bands 116
Wedding cake 118
Food & drink 122
Invitations 128
Entertainment 132
Wedding favours 136
Wedding transport 140
Honeymoon 144
Supplier directory 148

Section Four - *Guests & Gifts*

Guestlist planning 158
The perfect table plan 164
Gift tracking 170

Section Five - *The Big Day*

Readings & music for the ceremony 178
Photographer shot list 182
Itinerary 186
To do list 188
Wedding day essentials 190
Reflection 192

Introduction

BRIDE-TO-BE AND BEST-FRIEND OF THE EDITOR, ZARA GASPAR, SHARES HER WEDDING PLANNING EXPERIENCE

When I first got engaged I couldn't wait to get stuck into planning my big day. After all, I'd been waiting for this moment since I was 10 years old. I had thought of every last detail from the style of my invitations down to the type of shoes I wanted to wear.

I know people always say that planning a wedding can be stressful and overwhelming, but I didn't understand what could be so difficult. I thought it would be a cinch and was just excited to get started. But it turns out even an overplanner can turn into a bridezilla if she's not properly prepared.

As the saying goes, fail to plan and you plan to fail. Ok, so maybe you can't fail at organising your wedding day, but as many a bride before me will tell you, a lot can go wrong. I started planning my wedding without a journal thinking I didn't need one and everything got muddled. I mixed up appointments to see venues because I lost scraps of paper I'd written timings on, I got confused over which bands I'd seen and liked and I couldn't properly process anything because it wasn't all organised together in one place. But once I bought a journal, everything ran smoothly. Today, I look back on my wedding and am grateful I got myself sorted so that I could enjoy it fully and make the best memories that, thanks to my journal, I can treasure forever.

You've just got engaged. Are you excited or just really nervous and don't know where to start? Whatever you're feeling, this 'little white book' will be your closest companion until you say "I do." Keep it with you every step of the way along your wedding journey and it'll help you with every aspect from working out the logistics to coordinating everything from your engagement party to the honeymoon.

Planning a wedding is fun – you get to make the special day you've always dreamed about a reality – but it is also hard work. It takes time and organisation. A journal is the perfect way to keep on top of everything. It will get you going as you make a list of everything you need to do starting with your guest list. Why not draw a flow chart to decide who will make the final cut or create a spreadsheet to work out your budget and what you have to spend? Keep a note of all your appointments whether it's visiting venues or giving notice of your marriage at the council. Use it to create your seating plan, write playlists or revise the order of the day.

This is your comprehensive planner. It can be used for making checklists to see what you've completed and what's still left to do. You can keep a calendar or schedule with tasks and responsibilities set out by months, weeks and days counting down to the main event. There's a lot to think about from catering to transport and gift lists, but you can categorise it all into sections. It's a handy way to break it up into manageable tasks and writing it all down in one place will ensure nothing gets forgotten. Take it with you everywhere you go to show suppliers your ideas and to answer the million and one questions those like your fiancé, bridesmaids, or, most likely, your future mother-in-law will be asking.

Your journal is not only a way to stay organised, but it'll help you filter out your preferences too. By looking at the notes you've written in it, you can ascertain which venue is the right one for you, which flowers you preferred or which dress looked best on your bridesmaids. After looking at cake shop upon cake shop and photographer after photographer you're bound to be confused. I was so focused on the big picture, I almost forgot I needed to buy wedding rings!

You can also use these pages as a source of inspiration. What is your vision for the day? Jot down any ideas you have along the way, sketch out your dream veil or bodice to take to the wedding dress shop or draw out how you want your décor to look. It even works as a scrapbook. Tear out photos from magazines of hairstyles you like or makeup tips and attach business cards you've been given at wedding fairs or stores.

But this book is more than just a planner and a space to brainstorm your ideas and get creative. It can act as a diary too. You spend so much time planning your wedding and it goes by so quickly that often you forget just how much was involved in getting it all ready. Why not record all the details – not your plans, but the memories and special moments – from how you felt when you got engaged to asking your bridal party to be a part of it all. Using it as a diary gives you a chance to reflect on the real meaning of your wedding. Why not write down why you're marrying your partner and what you want from your marriage or how you felt when they proposed? It's not only a chance to remember what's important when you're arguing over whether or not you should have favours, but you can look back on it in years to come and relive the excitement of it all.

Even with the best-laid plans, it does get stressful and you may need a distraction. Keeping a journal is a great way for you to take time out for yourself and write down your thoughts. It can be quite therapeutic and help you unwind, especially if you're feeling tense and things aren't going to plan. Use your journal to find a solution to the problem. Run through the guestlist or budget again if you're worried it's costing too much. Look back over your ideas to make a final decision on décor or remind yourself of the size of the cake table.

At the end of the day the only thing that really matters is that on your chosen date, you'll be marrying your best friend and starting a new journey together. But if you want your dream wedding, the best way to achieve this is to be prepared. Things can go unexpectedly wrong. Guests will cancel at the last minute leaving you to rearrange the seating plan and the flowers you wanted may not be in season on the date you chose, but if you use these pages, no matter what happens, you can stay as cool as a cucumber, plan the perfect day and enjoy the ride along the way. A wedding is the first chapter of your love story – now's the time to get writing!

Zara Gaspar

Section One

Ideas

YOU PROBABLY HAVE A MILLION IDEAS SWIMMING AROUND IN YOUR HEAD, SO START YOUR WEDDING JOURNEY BY WRITING THEM DOWN

Your partner & you

YOU SAID ‘YES’, SO NOW COMES THE FUN PART – ORGANISING THE BIG DAY!

The moment you’ve always dreamed of has finally happened! Your partner has asked to put a ring on it and you said ‘yes’! But brace yourselves, because the minute you post that sparkler on social media you’ll be swept up in a tsunami of ‘this is what I did’, and ‘you should do it like this’ – and don’t forget the classic ‘I wouldn’t have done that it if it was my wedding’. Before you do anything, know that this is your relationship, your day, your life, and you have every right to plan the wedding of your – no-one else’s – dreams. The great thing about this wedding planner is it has literally everything covered so you won’t miss a thing. It’s designed to help you explore the styles, themes, and elements that are important to you and match them to your taste and budget. So what are you waiting for? Let’s plan your wedding!

Making it manageable

Many couples-to-be can find planning a wedding a tad overwhelming – understandable given the size, scale and very nature of what it represents, but it doesn't need to be that way. The good news is this wedding planner has been designed to present each part of the big day in manageable, bite-sized slices, allowing you to take wedding preparations at a pace that really suits you.

Memory keepsake

As well as serving as a 'we've got everything covered all-in-one place' wedding planner that will help you to create the wedding of which you've always hoped, this book offers masses of creative spaces and prompts for you to jot down key memories about your relationship and thoughts or emotions that arise during this very special time. By the end of this journey you'll not only have the most beautiful wedding day, but a truly memorable keepsake you'll cherish for a lifetime that you may one day hand down to the generations that follow.

YOUR HISTORY

Now let's look back at your relationship. Write down the story of you as a couple – how did you meet? Was it love at first sight? When did you know you wanted to spend the rest of your life together? Also think about special dates and times that you have spent together. Write down as much as you can about your relationship so far as it might help to identity themes and quirks that will make your wedding extra-special.

> “Write down as much as you can about your relationship so far as it might help to identity themes and quirks”

Couple milestones

/ WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

◇ I'm from ____________________

____

◇ My partner is from ____________

____

/ YOUR IMPORTANT DATES

Dates that are important for us are...

◇ / /
◇ / /
◇ / /
◇ / /
◇ / /
◇ / /
◇ / /
◇ / /
◇ / /

/ SPECIAL PLACES

Places that are important for us are...

◇
◇
◇
◇
◇
◇

/ INTERESTS

Our shared interests are...

◇
◇
◇
◇
◇
◇

THE PROPOSAL

You've probably recounted how your partner popped the question countless times since you said yes, but let's make sure you remember everything about it for years to come. Use this space to write about how it happened; include how you felt and what was on your mind before and after. Did you see it coming, or did it take you by surprise?

Your priorities

CIRCLE EVERYTHING THAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU AND CROSS OUT THINGS THAT YOU'RE NOT BOTHERED ABOUT

/ INVITATIONS

- Paper invitations
- Email invitations
- Save-the-date cards

/ BRIDE

- Wedding dress
- Jewellery
- Veil
- Make up
- Hair
- Wedding ring
- Shoes
- Accessories
- Lingerie

/ OTHER PEOPLE

- Flower girl(s)
- Page boy(s)
- Ushers
- Ring bearer
- Reader(s)

/ GROOM

- Morning suit
- Tuxedo
- Cuff links
- Shoes
- Socks
- Tie
- Waistcoat
- Pocket square
- Watch
- Wedding ring

/ BEST MEN

- Suit
- Tie
- Waistcoat
- Shoes
- Socks
- Gifts
- Speech
- Special tasks/ roles on the day

/ BRIDESMAIDS

- Maid of honour
- Bridesmaid dresses
- Shoes
- Jewellery
- Gifts
- Speech
- Special tasks/ roles on the day

/ TRADITIONS

- Receiving line
- Dances with parents
- Bouquet toss
- Cake cutting
- Grand entrance
- First dance
- Garter toss
- Speeches

If things pop into your head as you go through the list, don't be afraid to note them down. It's your journal after all!

/ CEREMONY

- ◇ Standard vows
- ◇ Personal vows
- ◇ Special readings
- ◇ Religion
- ◇ Officiant
- ◇ Programs
- ◇ Hymns
- ◇ Musician

/ FLOWERS

- ◇ Buttonholes/ boutonnières
- ◇ Ceremony venue flowers
- ◇ Bridal bouquet
- ◇ Bridesmaid flowers
- ◇ Corsages
- ◇ Reception flowers

/ DRINK

- ◇ Cocktail hour
- ◇ Champagne toast
- ◇ Drinks reception
- ◇ Open bar
- ◇ Wine on the table
- ◇ Beer
- ◇ Non alcoholic drinks

/ MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT

- ◇ Band
- ◇ DJ
- ◇ Dancing
- ◇ First song
- ◇ Playlist
- ◇ Karaoke
- ◇ Photo booth
- ◇ Games

/ SEATING AND TABLES

- ◇ Top table
- ◇ Chairs
- ◇ Place cards
- ◇ Wedding favours
- ◇ Dinner tables
- ◇ Cocktail tables
- ◇ Seating chart
- ◇ Personalised napkins
- ◇ Table runners
- ◇ Centre pieces
- ◇ Candles
- ◇ Table accessories
- ◇ Table linen

/ FOOD

- ◇ Wedding cake
- ◇ Fine dining
- ◇ Three-course meal
- ◇ Buffet
- ◇ BBQ
- ◇ Appetizers
- ◇ Evening snacks
- ◇ Desserts
- ◇ Other food

/ OTHER

- ◇ Theme
- ◇ Friends
- ◇ Family
- ◇ Impressing guests
- ◇ Huge party
- ◇ Intimate gathering
- ◇ Hen do
- ◇ Stag do
- ◇ Honeymoon
- ◇ Fine dining
- ◇ Photography
- ◇ Gift registry
- ◇ Guest book

Wedding *party*

BEING PART OF SOMEONE'S SPECIAL DAY IS AN HONOUR LIKE NO OTHER. SO, WHO WILL YOU CHOOSE?

◇ Our Maid of Honour will be ______________________________

◇ Because... ______________________________

____

____

____

◇ Our Best Man will be ______________________________

◇ Because... ______________________________

Shortlist your faves

Chances are you've known for quite some time who you'd ask to be a part of your wedding party when the moment came, but if you have a few 'spots' to fill then create a shortlist and narrow down the options based on factors, such as who you are closer to (not only emotionally but also in terms of distance), who you can trust to not let you down, and what your other half thinks.

Are you planning on having bridesmaids, ushers, a flower girl, page boy or ring bearer? Or do you have friends or family that you'd like to delegate a job to on the day? Write down who else you have picked to be part of your day here...

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

◇ Name ______________ ◇ Role ______________

Will you *be my...?*

ONCE YOU KNOW WHO YOU WILL ASK, YOU'LL NEED TO DECIDE HOW TO ASK...

Alongside the wedding party stalwarts of best men, bridesmaids and a maid of honour, there are flower girls, page boys, ushers, ring bearer(s), witnesses, and the parent(s)/person who will give the bride away - all honours in their own right, and each worthy of some hefty consideration. The good news is that once you've picked your line-up you can have fun asking them in all sorts of fun and memorable ways. Read on to discover a few ideas to help you get started.

Fill a box with all of their favourite things and at the bottom write a message to pop the question.

Hide a message inside a fortune cookie.

Give a card or gift, such as something personal like an engraved bracelet or something fun like a bottle of prosecco, with the message ‘I can’t say ‘I do’ without you’.

If you’re a crafty then why not make them a memorable gift with the question enclosed, such as knitted on a scarf or written in icing on a home-baked cake?

Ask some lyrically blessed friends to help you compose and sing the proposal in person or over a video call.

Take them somewhere that means a lot to the two of you and write it in the earth or sand, or hand them a card with the message on it.

Budget considerations

When weighing up who you’ll ask it might be a good idea to first work out just how many you can afford to ask. It’s not just outfits you’ll need to buy – there’s the additional items of bouquets, buttonholes, shoes, accessories, and thank-you gifts, which can see costs creep up. It may be wise to have one fewer bridesmaid and have the day of your dreams, for example, than have one extra bridesmaid and have to make compromises elsewhere.

Make your money *go further*

IT'S NO SECRET THAT WEDDINGS ARE EXPENSIVE, SO HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO SAVE INSTEAD OF SPLURGE

Even the most down-to-earth, intimate weddings can cost a pretty penny, so it's a good idea to set out your budget from day one. The first thing to do is to work out how much you have to spend, which will mean adding up your combined savings, asking family members if they are able to contribute, selling off unwanted goods, picking up extra overtime, and even hunting for loose change down the back of the sofa. Once you know how much you have to play with, you can begin assigning portions of the budget to all the vital elements, such as the venue, food, entertainment, bridal and grooms wear, invitations and so on. To help remain in the black, here are a few money saving tips to help your funds go further.

WED OUT OF SEASON

Autumn and winter weddings are significantly cheaper in all respects than their warmer counterparts, and quite often fancier venues will forgo their minimum guest number.

SKILLS EQUALS SAVINGS

Use any skills you or your friends have to cut down on costs, be it flower arranging, calligraphy writing, decoration making, dJing or cake baking - there are so many opportunities to save.

FAKE OVER FRESH

Fresh flowers can be one of the most expensive parts of the day, and the trouble is they only really live for the day, so consider faking it. Not only are fake flowers more cost-effective, but you can keep them forever.

STAY PUT

By using the same venue for the ceremony and reception, you can cut your costs considerably, and if you can find one that offers no corkage you'll be able to take your own alcohol too – a win-win all round.

LOVE PRELOVED

Use websites to pick up a bargain or two, from bridesmaid dresses to hair accessories, table plans to decorations, there's plenty of scope to save.

◇ Our maximum budget is ______________

Now think about how you would ideally like to split the budget up. What are your spending priorities and where do you think you can save money?

/ TOP 5 SPENDING PRIORITIES

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

/ WE CAN SAVE MONEY BY:

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

More ways to save...

There are so many ways to save – you just need to know where to look. First, forget expensive stationery; download a free app to create a digital version instead. It's the 21st century way. When it comes to venues, think outside the box: rent a house or piece of land, or simply head to the beach or forest. Finally, don't blindly use the venue's preferred suppliers – shop around and give haggling a shot.

How should you say 'I do'?

TIMES HAVE CHANGED, AND NOW THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO TIE THE KNOT

Traditionally, most wedding ceremonies tend to feature a processional (the bride and her bridesmaids entering), a welcome address by the officiant, readings, vows, ring exchange, pronouncement of marriage, the kiss, the signing of the register, the officiant's closing remarks, and finally the recessional, where the couple leave the ceremony as newlyweds followed by the wedding party. However, as we have evolved so have our wedding ceremonies, and today there is so much more opportunity to inject some personality into the occasion. The options are limitless, and the important thing to remember is there is no one way to do it; you are within your rights to find a symbolic way that reflects your love and intention of spending your lives together any way you want. So, if you're not going down the religious route or opting for a non-religious humanist ceremony, perhaps try one of these methods to say 'I do'.

TREE-PLANTING CEREMONIES

As the name suggests, the couple plant a tree together in a pot, symbolising their marriage, which they take home and tend to.

SAND CEREMONIES

Here, the wedding pair fill a jar with two colours of sand to represent two people and two families coming together as one.

FLOWER CEREMONIES

This involves the couple exchanging a symbolic flower of their choosing and placing it in a vase, which is then accompanied by a chosen flower from each guest, until at the end the vase is full.

HANDFASTINGS

Commonly used in Wiccan and Pagan ceremonies, this practice sees the couple's hands bound together as a gesture of their connection and devotion to one another.

WATER CEREMONIES

This sees the couple fill a vessel with liquid together; typically this is water, but more recently newlyweds have got a lot more creative, opting for wine, (perfect if you're marrying in a vineyard), or seawater (ideal for beach-front nuptials).

- Describe your ideal wedding ceremony in as much detail as you can.

/ WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT YOUR CEREMONY?

- ◇
- ◇
- ◇

Out with the old, in with the new

As ceremonies are evolving, so are 'traditions' that go with them. For example, today many couples write their own vows, choose music that reflects their love story, honour loved ones who have passed by lighting candles, and even include a pet. One of the big ones to change has been to ask guests to choose a seat not a side (which differs based on religion) for a much more friendly and welcoming approach.

Party time!

LET YOUR HAIR DOWN AND ENJOY YOURSELF – THE RECEPTION IS ALL ABOUT HAVING FUN!

The reception usually follows an hour or so after the wedding breakfast (the formal sit-down meal with speeches) ends, at the beginning of the evening, and sees a number of 'new' guests arrive. These guests are still important, but perhaps not as close to have been invited to the wedding itself, for example friends of family members, colleagues or relations whom you've not seen for a while. Here a few things to consider when arranging your reception:

VENUE

The first thing you need to decide is where to hold the reception. Most couples book an all-in-one venue for the wedding breakfast and reception (and even the ceremony itself) to save on costs and hassle, but you could have a second (or third location) if you wish.

Set the tone

Make your guests feel really welcome by offering them a delicious drink or two upon arrival, or host a cocktail hour with some bitesize canapes. Some couples also like to have a receiving line, which sees the bride's parents, groom's parents, bride, groom, maid of honour and bridesmaids (in that order, usually alternating male and female where possible) greet the guests and receive their congratulations as they arrive at the venue.

WEATHER WATCH

While it's deemed 'lucky' if it rains on your wedding day, a downpour could threaten the festivities of an al-fresco do, so ensure you have a backup plan if things take a turn for the worse.

FIRST DANCE

The band or DJ will welcome you both to the dance floor for your first dance as a married couple, which lasts the length of one song. The music should be chosen by you and can be choreographed or casual. Towards the end of the track, it's common practice to invite the wedding party to join you on the dance floor, followed by the other guests, at which point you may like to break apart and dance with your parents.

BOUQUET AND GARTER TOSS

Traditionally, the bride hurls her bouquet to a throng of unmarried women during the reception. Whichever singleton catches it is said to be next to marry, but these days, most brides will allow anyone to catch the flowers. The garter toss is less common today, but works on the same principle with all the eligible bachelors waiting to catch it after the groom removes it from the bride's leg.

Find more information on reception details such as cutting the cake, food and photographs later in the book.

- Describe your ideal wedding reception in as much detail as you can.

/ WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT YOUR RECEPTION?

◇

◇

◇

Make a grand exit

Traditionally, the bride and groom leave just before the celebrations end, and the 'carriages' (taxis or coaches) arrive, to a fanfare of love and congratulations from their guests. This is a subtle way to let everyone know that the evening has come to an end, and gives you a chance to bid farewell to the well wishers. In the past, the couple would be whisked off to start their honeymoon.

Create a mood board

BRING YOUR WEDDING VISION TO LIFE WITH A MOOD BOARD

With so much to plan and so many decisions to make, it can feel a little overwhelming knowing where to start, but that's where a mood board can help! Deciding what you want your wedding to look like, on the atmosphere you want to create, and on the overall theme that you're going for should be one of the first things you want to pin down, as this will help you to make all the decisions that follow. From decorations to flowers, and attire to venue choice, a mood or wedding-inspiration board is a great tool for helping to decide what to buy, as it will enable you to collate everything that you like and want for your wedding in one place for you to use as a reference point. Here's how it's done...

◆ STEP 1 ◆

PHYSICAL OR DIGITAL?

There are several ways to create a mood board. The first is more crafty, and involves cutting up catalogues and magazines, sticking colours, materials and 'must-haves' to a large sheet of paper. Alternatively, you can use apps or social-media services like Pinterest to 'pin' anything that catches your eye, which you can also share with others in your wedding party.

◆ STEP 2 ◆

PICK A THEME

As you flick through magazines, wedding blogs and inspiration apps, you'll find yourself drawn to particular styles, for example: bohemian, rustic, minimalistic, romantic, colourful, fun, bold and bright, classical, coastal or earthy, and so on. Once you know what style you like the most, you can start to build your board using this theme as a guide.

◆ STEP 3 ◆

COLLECT COLOURS

When you've picked a style you like, choose a colour palette of no more than four colours that fits, for example if you like a botany theme, plump for shades of green, beige and brown, whereas for a Southwestern style look to yellow, orange, navy and bright green. Then start to find accents, elements and even attire (such as bridesmaid dresses) sporting these hues.

◆ STEP 4 ◆

TEXTILES AND MATERIALS

Just like colours, look for fabrics that complement your vibe, for example silks for classical, hessian for rustic, lace for romantic, or velvet for vintage. This will help you to narrow down choices for items like napkins, chair dressings, decorations, favours and even your wedding dress!

◆ STEP 5 ◆

ORGANISE INSPIRATION

If you've opted for a physical board, organise it into sections such as flowers, lighting, stationery, decorations, attire and so on, to avoid confusion and keep things easy to visually digest. If you're using an app, create separate boards for these different elements.

Refine and remodel

Once you've 'completed' your mood board, stand back and take a good look at it. If you get a tingle of excitement, take it as a green light to start sourcing and buying at will. However, if you feel it's not quite what you want, you can take things off, refine it, change it, or completely bin it and start again. That's the beauty of mood boards! If you're indecisive by nature, try creating several options and then pick your favourite at the end.

Notes

To-do list

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To-do list

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Section Two

Countdown

USE THESE PAGES TO KEEP TRACK OF IMPORTANT DATES, APPOINTMENTS AND TO-DO LISTS AS YOU START PLANNING YOUR BIG DAY

Hold the date

WITH SO MANY SEASONS AND DATES TO CHOOSE FROM, WHICH ONE WILL YOU PICK?

It's a question agonised over by many a bride and groom, and with 365 days (sometimes a whopping 366) to choose from, it can be tricky to know where to start. That said there are ways to narrow it down...

TIME TO PLAN

The wedding date will affect how much time you have to plan. For example, if you become engaged on Valentine's day and want a spring wedding, you'll either have to power through in a few short months or wait over a year. Be aware that most venues will have been booked up months – if not years – in advance, while custom-made items, such as the wedding dress and cake, can take a significant amount of time to prepare.

Lucky you

In some cultures the eighth day of the eighth month (8 August) is said to be an incredibly lucky day to wed, favoured for its perfectly symmetrical form. Many believe the seventh to be a lucky day, as it's a number repeated in many religious texts, especially in Christianity and Judaism. In ancient Rome, poets suggested that April (which was sacred to Venus, the goddess of love) and June (Juno, the goddess of marriage) were the best months to marry.

CHOOSE A MONTH

Traditionally the most popular month to marry is June because there's less chance of rain, but unlike July and August which are typically drier, the climate is a touch cooler and less likely to stifle your guests or ruin your make-up. In recent years, with climate change heralding sunnier weather, there has been a rise in September and October weddings. To save money, look to November through to February for holding the big day.

CHOOSE A DAY

Saturday is the most popular day to marry, as many people will have the day off work and as they don't have to get up early on the Sunday can sleep off any indulgences from the night before. If you're looking to cut costs, Fridays and Sundays make much cheaper alternatives.

PICK A NUMBER

With a month, and perhaps a day now in mind, you can narrow it down between the four options within that month to actually pick a date. Perhaps one of those dates/numbers has some special meaning to you and your relationship – for example, the number of years you've been together or the same date you first said 'I love you'.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Another consideration could be to choose a date nearer the start of the month as it's closer to pay day, and may appease your guests who have hotel rooms and travel to pay for. Check to see if there are any sporting events that could potentially distract your guests that month and avoid those dates like the plague. Run the shortlist of dates past key members of your wedding party to avoid clashes with holidays, appointments and other things that they can't set aside. Finally, if you find a venue that you fall in love with, you might just find you have the decision made for you depending on what's available.

Unlucky in love

According to statistics, the least popular day to get married is on Christmas Day, while Friday 13th also features pretty low down on people's wish list of dates. The Ides of March (15 March) also has a historic reputation for being a day of doom. If superstition is important to you, perhaps check online to see what days you should avoid based on yours and your partner's horoscopes.

Our chosen date is...

Circle the date you have chosen

/ DAY

- ◇ Monday
- ◇ Tuesday
- ◇ Wednesday
- ◇ Thursday
- ◇ Friday
- ◇ Saturday
- ◇ Sunday

/ DATE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
26 27 28 29 30 31

/ MONTH

- ◇ January
- ◇ February
- ◇ March
- ◇ April
- ◇ May
- ◇ June
- ◇ July
- ◇ August
- ◇ September
- ◇ October
- ◇ November
- ◇ December

/ YEAR

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Countdown calendar

Use the next few pages to organise and reflect on your wedding planning. List everything that you need to do by certain deadlines and also keep track of important dates like paying suppliers or the RSVP deadline.

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Important dates

One year to go!

Important dates

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Six months to go!

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Important dates

Five months to go!

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Four months to go!

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✧ Important dates

Three months to go!

Important dates

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Two months to go!

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Important dates

One month to go!

Important dates

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Three weeks to go!

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Important dates

Two weeks to go!

Important dates

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One week to go!

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Important dates

Section Three

Planning

NOW YOU'VE GOT ALL YOUR
IDEAS IT'S TIME TO START
ORGANISING YOUR SPECIAL DAY

Supplier & venue search

WHETHER IT'S CARS, CATERING OR CLOTHES, WHATEVER YOU NEED THERE’S A SUPPLIER FOR THAT

So now that you have a date in mind and some inspiration for the style or theme you want your wedding to explore, the next step is finding a venue and suppliers that can help bring those ideas to life by the deadline of the big day.

When searching for a shortlist of wedding venues, look for places that align and even enhance your vision. There’s no point, for example, booking a former industrial or minimalist space for a soft romantic or even rustic vibe. If you have a rough idea of how many guests you want to invite, this will also help you to narrow your search, as you’ll not only need a venue that can accomodate that number, but also one that works with your budget because most places will charge per head.

When you have an idea of where you want your wedding to be, you can begin searching for suppliers local to the venue, or alternatively source things yourself (although if this is the case, be aware of how you will get these items to the wedding if it is some distance away, or be prepared to factor in delivery costs). Some of the best places to look for suppliers are wedding magazines, dedicated blogs, or ask friends and family for their recommendations. It's important that you shop around to not only find a good deal, but also to ensure you use a company who you trust to meet your expectations.

For some elements of the wedding you'll need to try before you buy. For example, wedding cake creators will often offer samples – either for free, or relatively little cost – for you to test. Likewise, many venues will incorporate a tasting menu into the cost of a package or ask for a separate fee to allow you to sample potential meal options for your wedding breakfast, canapes, reception food and so on, as well as providing you with several wines to pair it with.

While it's a good idea to email suppliers to get quotes, it's wise to meet some of the suppliers in person before making your final decision. For example, the photographer will be spending many hours with you on your special day, so it's important you have a good rapport and ultimately, like them and their work. The same goes for the DJ or band, plus the event/wedding planner who works for the venue you wish to hire.

Wedding fairs

At a wedding fair you can try cake, sample wine, smell flowers, feel dress materials and see how they move during a fashion show – in short it's the perfect opportunity to be inspired and form a 'real' tangible opinion of wedding products and services in your area. What's more, you can haggle with suppliers, compare vendors and if you visit on the final day you'll be sure to nab a bargain or two.

Venue shopping

FROM CASTLES AND BARNS, TO COUNTRYSIDE MANSIONS AND RENOVATED WAREHOUSES, HERE'S HOW TO FIND YOUR DREAM VENUE

There are literally thousands of venue options for you to choose from, so how do you narrow the search? By deciding what's most important to you! Here are a few pointers to get you started…

ONE, TWO OR THREE VENUES

Weddings typically feature three main elements: the ceremony, a wedding breakfast, and the reception. You can pick a different venue for each or find somewhere that caters for all (or several) aspects in one place. Having the venue in one place can be more cost effective, improves the flow of the day and saves you and your guests a lot of hassle moving from one location to

Guest experience

Typically weddings run for between eight and ten hours, so run through the itinerary of the day with the event planner at the venue. You don't want any part to feel rushed, but equally you don't want lulls where your guests could get bored. It's also a good idea to check out the bathroom facilities your guests will be using and ask if there will be power points people can use to charge their phones.

the next. The advantage of having the day spread across more than one venue is that you can tailor it precisely to your vision – for example, if you want a religious ceremony, such as a church wedding, or to have the formal dinner at a particular restaurant or in a more intimate setting.

SIZE MATTERS

Large or small, it's important that the venue is the right size for the number of guests you invite. If it's too big the venue will feel empty and your guests could feel uncomfortable and awkward, whereas if it's too small your guests may feel stifled and cramped. If you're allowing children to the festivities then it's a good idea to have large areas indoors and outdoors where they can run off some of their pent-up energy. Why not also consider lawn games to keep them occupied?

Images can be deceptive – all a photographer needs to do is use a wide-angle lens and suddenly cosy rooms look massive, which is why it's always advisable to view a venue yourself before you book. If this is just impossible, ask for a video, read previous customer reviews and ask to see seating plans to see how other couples were able to fit everyone in comfortably.

Iron out the wrinkles

Run through any special requests before you book. For example, can the venue cater for the sort of food you like? Do you have to use their list of suppliers? Are you allowed a DJ/band and what is their policy on entertainment outside? Have you got your heart set on candles, fireworks, bonfires or sparklers, and if so, what is their policy? Will you have exclusive use of the venue or will there be other people or even another wedding there?

COMPLEMENT YOUR VISION

Once you know what style of wedding you want to go for, look for venues that match that vibe. Some popular choices include castles and countryside mansions (for romantic or glamorous vibes), art galleries or renovated warehouses (for a more modern feel), fairy-light-clad woodlands (for a more bohemian take on a wedding), restored barns (for a rustic feel), and don't forget destination weddings abroad. The venue's colour palette may also play a part in your considerations, especially if it clashes drastically with your vision or if it sports neutral tones, check to see whether you can bring in elements such as decorations, flowers, fabrics and napkins to hone the overall aesthetic in line with your vision. Also consider the lighting – is it bright and bold or intimate and romantic, and how does this affect the style you are going for? It's also worth thinking about how lighting will affect photographs. When you go on the venue's tour, ask to see all of the grounds and any buildings that are available for you to use on the day, as this may inspire you further and could also present potential photography hotspots.

COME RAIN OR SHINE

According to Hinduism, if it rains on your wedding day it's a good sign that your marriage will be strong – after all, according to legend, tied knots are harder to break when wet. That said, no-one wants to spend the day feeling soggy, so ensure you know what the venue's back-up plan is if the weather takes a turn for the worse. If possible visit your shortlisted establishments in the sunshine and the rain, so that whatever happens on the day you'll know exactly what to expect for everything from where the guests will be to how dark it is inside.

Venue requirements

List exactly what you want from your venue here with the most important considerations at the top

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BUDGET CONCERNS

Likely to be one of the biggest considerations here is money. Just be aware many venues require a minimum number of guests so take this into account when budgeting. Alternatively, if you love the place but can't quite afford it, look to marry on a day other than Saturday or out of season. If you have your heart set on a particular date it's a good idea to book 12 to 18 months in advance.

Venue name:

/ LOCATION ◇ ____________________

/ CAPACITY ◇ ____________________

/ CATERING OPTIONS ◇ ____________________

/ COST ◇ ____________________

/ DEPOSIT ◇ ____________________

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ____________________

/ AVAILABILTY ◇ ____________________

Venue name:

/ LOCATION ◇ ____________________

/ CAPACITY ◇ ____________________

/ CATERING OPTIONS ◇ ____________________

/ COST ◇ ____________________

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A home *away from home*

ACCOMMODATION ISN'T JUST A NICE TOUCH FOR YOUR GUESTS – IT MEANS THEY CAN STAY UNTIL THE VERY END

Location, location, location isn't only important when buying a house – it's also an important consideration when choosing a wedding venue.

To make things easier for your guests, it's thoughtful to consider where most people will be coming from and to select an establishment in that area. That said, it's your day and you're entitled to have it wherever you see fit, and if your friends and family want to see you get married they will of course make the journey if they can.

As most wedding receptions run into the wee small hours, it's likely that most people, especially those who have indulged with alcohol, won't be driving all the way home that night, and therefore some form of accommodation will be necessary. Some wedding establishments that offer accommodation often provide a deal or discount for guests to stay overnight at the venue, which may become an important factor when you are narrowing down your shortlist of venues.

If the venue only has a limited number or rooms, or is more expensive than what some of your guests can afford, check to see whether there are enough hotels or other accommodation options nearby, such as Airbnb, or even caravan and camping sites.

Transport choices

Transport is a chief consideration you'll need to think about on behalf of your guests. You could put on coaches or minibuses to transport your guests from a pick-up point to the venue, or from one location to another. Just check whether they can reach the venue, as narrow, country lanes and wide, long vehicles tend not to mix. Alternatively, if guests need to make their own arrangements, ensure the venue has plenty of parking spaces and find out whether there are any taxi firms serving the area.

/ ONCE YOU HAVE CHOSEN YOUR RECEPTION VENUE, MAKE A LIST OF WHERE YOUR GUESTS MIGHT BE ABLE TO STAY:

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Will you marry us?

RELIGIOUS, STATE, CELEBRANT OR FRIEND – WHO WILL YOU ASK TO MARRY YOU?

In the UK you can be legally married in either a religious or civil (non-religious, conducted by a government or civil official) ceremony. For it to be deemed legal you must give notice (see p88) and it must be conducted by a person, or in the presence of a person, who is authorised to register marriages in that district. You and your partner have to sign the marriage register individually, plus two witnesses of your choosing, and the person conducting the ceremony, or if that person is not authorised to register marriages then the person who is. If you're planning a destination wedding, make sure you follow the procedure of the law in that country.

REGISTRAR

After you've given notice to marry you can arrange with the registrar the details of where you would like them (or one of their colleagues) to marry you, whether that's the local register office or a local approved premises (or ask them to put you in touch with registrars in the area you wish to marry). This is your opportunity to discuss what form of words will be used (these can't be religious), and plans to include readings, songs and music. On the wedding day each partner will be asked by the registrar to repeat a standard set of vows, which you can't change but can add to (as long as they aren't religious), and then the signing of the register completes the ceremony.

Help from a friend

Why not make your big day even more memorable and personal by having a trusted friend or beloved family member conduct the ceremony? Just as in the case of a celebrant, you can conduct the ceremony anywhere! You will need to give notice (at least 28 days before) and then either just before or after the wedding ceremony, pop back to the local registry office with your two witnesses, to make your commitment legally binding.

CELEBRANT

A wedding celebrant is a professionally trained, fully insured officiant, who can create a completely bespoke and personalised ceremony for you, incorporating unique symbolic aspects, such as sand, water or tree planting. In this instance, you can write your own vows, and the ceremony itself can take place pretty much anywhere, including outdoors – on a beach, clifftop or in a forest, for example. If you want to use a celebrant you will still need to give notice at the register office (usually the day before or after the wedding ceremony), and will need to be legally married in a simple service to complete your paperwork and declarations. You'll both need to be present, as well as your two witnesses.

RELIGIOUS OFFICIAL

If you have your heart set on a church wedding (Church of England or Wales) you can register the marriage at the same time as the ceremony, and you don't have to give notice unless you are a non-EEA national. For other religious marriages, however, you will need to give notice. Ministers and priests of all other religions can be authorised to register marriages but need to have a certificate/license from the local Superintendent Register, whereas for Jewish and Quaker marriages, the authorisation is automatic.

Giving notice

FOR A MARRIAGE TO BE LEGAL, YOU AND YOUR PARTNER NEED TO GIVE NOTICE

At least 28 days before your wedding you will need to visit your local register office (these may be different if you live in different districts), regardless of where you plan to marry. The Superintendent Registrar will issue authority for the marriage (approve the marriage licence) and you'll then be able to get married in any register office or local authority-approved venue in any district in England and Wales within 12 months. There are various other legal stipulations and you'll need a range of documents, so check your local council's website for more information.

Write down potential options of who will officiate your special day

/ NAME ◇ ______________________________

/ ABOUT ◇ ______________________________

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/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ______________________________

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ NAME ◇ ____

/ ABOUT ◇ ____

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ____________________________

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ NAME ◇ ____

/ ABOUT ◇ ____

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/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ NAME ◇ ____

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/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

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/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ____________________________

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

Choosing a photographer

YOUR BIG DAY WILL GO BY IN A FLASH – A PHOTOGRAPHER WILL ENSURE THE MEMORIES LAST A LIFETIME

Most professional photographers offer an all-day package with a set of digital images starting from around £1,500/$2,000, which may seem like a lot of money, but their pictures will capture the day you've worked so hard towards making perfect (and spent so much money on). But budget isn't the only consideration you should have when choosing who to book...

STYLE

Not every photographer will shoot in the same style – some offer 'traditional' photography, which is typically quite formal with posed setups including many groups; whereas a 'contemporary' style is less rigid and includes many candids (shots of people unaware they are having their picture taken). Traditional will take longer to organise on the day, but the images are considered 'timeless', whereas contemporary can look dramatic and unique, as long as the photographer has some good ideas and techniques. To get a feel of their work, check out photographers' online galleries, read their Bio/About Us page, and ask to speak to previous clients or read their reviews.

SMALL PRINT

Agree a time for the photographer to start and finish. Usually they start during the bridal prep in the morning, and finish after the cutting of the cake at the reception. It's also a good idea to run through your must-have shots, and the group shots you really want so there is no disappointment or confusion later. Find out whether they require a meal, as you'll need to arrange this with the venue, and whether there will be one or two photographers on the day. Talk about which 'products' their package includes, as digital files will keep costs down, but an album or canvas will be a great way to remember the day. Find out what their back-up plan is should something go awry, and be sure to read their contract before you sign and put down a deposit to hold the date. Finally, as some high-end cameras shoot both stills and video simultaneously, decide whether you want them to also film some of the key moments, or perhaps consider hiring a separate videographer.

PERSONALITY

As the wedding photographer will be with you all day, it's a good idea to meet a few of the candidates in person before you book, to see how well you 'gel' with one another. Ideally, they'll have a 'nice' personality, and not be too bossy or too shy. If they don't know the venue, it's a good idea to meet there before the big day to walk around and get some inspiration for backdrops and where they might take key images requested on your shot list (see more on this on page 182).

Engagement shoot

Once you find a photographer you like, and whose images you admire, before you pay a deposit it's a good idea to book them for an engagement shoot, to get a taste of how they work and what you can expect them to be like on the day. You'll also receive a portfolio of romantic shots that you can use for your wedding stationery or as part of the decor.

Write down potential photographers who could shoot your special day:

/ **NAME** ◇ ____________________

/ **ABOUT** ◇ ____________________

/ **COST** ◇ ____________________

/ **CONTACT INFORMATION** ◇ ____________________

/ **ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO**

/ NAME ◇ ____________________

/ ABOUT ◇ ____________________

/ COST ◇ ____________________

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ____________________

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ NAME ◇ ____________________

/ ABOUT ◇ ____________________

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/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ____________________

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

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/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ NAME ◇ ____________________

/ ABOUT ◇ ____________________

/ COST ◇ ____________________

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ____________________

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

Every wedding needs a theme

PICK A THEME, ANY THEME, TO UNITE ALL THE ELEMENTS OF YOUR BIG DAY

A theme helps you to bring all the elements of your wedding together under one aesthetically pleasing, uber-organised umbrella. From drinks to decor, attire to venue, food to favours, invitations to seating plans – having a theme makes shopping choices easier, ensures the look and feel of your wedding is consistent from start to finish, and ultimately creates a much more polished and pleasing result for you and your guests to behold and experience. The theme you pick should obviously be a style that you and your partner both love, but beyond looks and trends, the theme can reflect your personality, your tastes, and even your story. Here are some ideas to find a theme that suits you…

VENUE TO MATCH

Consistency is key, so once you know what your theme is, find a venue that embodies that theme (for example, for a rustic theme try a renovated cider barn; for folksy, look to create a woodland festival with twinkly lights and tents, and so on). Conversely, if you find a venue you love, use its aesthetics to build a theme that complements it. To begin with, this might just be broad-stroke ideas of fancy, formal, casual or fun, and then as you build your mood board – using inspiration from blogs and magazines – you can add finer details to hone the overall direction you want to take it in.

TIME TRENDS

If there's a period in time that has always fascinated you, what better way to live a day in the past than your wedding day? The roaring 20s, swinging 60s and war-time 40s are some of the most popular choices, but if you're up for a bigger challenge, jump outside the box – think medieval, Georgian or even Victorian. This is particularly helpful if your theme is based on your favourite show that happens to be set in the past.

Most popular wedding themes

If you're not the type to go off-brand, the ten most popular wedding trends in recent times according to wedding blog *Easy Weddings* are: rustic, traditional, romantic, garden, glitz & glam, vintage, beach, boho chic, vineyard, and costume/fantasy. This last option has really taken off in recent times, and has seen couples don everything from cloaks à la Harry Potter to mouse ears and princess dresses in homage to all things Disney. The only limitation is your imagination!

SEASON STYLE

If you're getting married outside of summer, let the seasons guide your theme and be inspired by nature. Spring-themed weddings feature pastel shades and flower arrangements of tulips, bluebells, daffodils and peonies – you could even hide chocolate eggs across the grounds for small (and big) kids to find. Autumn weddings can be a riot of orange, red and brown, with rustic wreaths hanging on the walls, atmospheric candles, and carved pumpkins sat atop crisp, fallen leaves. Winter weddings can inspire swaths of cool ice blue, white and grey. Or if the big day is close to Christmas Day, you could opt for traditional Yuletide fare and decor to bring some festiveness to the festivities.

FAVOURITE COLOURS

Use each of your favourite colours to direct your theme, for example if you adore blue and yellow, why not plan a beach wedding and use these colours to accent everything from the table covers to stationery. This design principle is known as colour blocking, and sees the pairing of two or three different colours to make a bold statement. Alternatively, a colour wheel can help you to choose which hues to use; just plump for tones close together for complementary colours, or opposite one another for clashing contrasts. For instance, to create a soft, romantic vibe try dusty pink, cream and light grey. For a vintage feel, try emerald green, crimson and magnolia. Or for a Nordic winter wonderland theme, think light blue (sky), white (snow) and brown (bare trees).

Use this space to write down potential themes for your wedding and what each one would involve:

/ THEME IDEA 1 ◇ ____________________

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/ THEME IDEA 2 ◇ ______________________________

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/ THEME IDEA 3 ◇ ______________________________

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/ THEME IDEA 4 ◇ ______________________________

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CELEBRATE YOUR HERITAGE

Your wedding is a fabulous opportunity to celebrate who you are, and part of this can be your heritage. This needn't just be from a religious standpoint, but your cultural background and ancestry, near or distant too. Don't panic if you as a couple have different heritages – celebrate both families, and treat it as a fiesta of cultural fusion. Just think how much fun you can have fusing everything from the food to the fashion!

Popular themes

While trends for themes vary year-on-year, there are some that remain popular. These include: the classic wedding (formal, timeless elegance with white florals); glamorous (metallic, extravagant decor such as tall centrepieces); boho (casual vibe with natural shades, naked cakes and mismatched bridesmaid dresses); romantic (a focus on florals, often with a garden or castle venue); rustic (barn venue with natural decor such as rope and wood); vintage (classic cars, hair and dresses from different eras and alternative (quirky, special interest e.g. movie-theme).

Say yes to *the dress!*

TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF DRESSING TO IMPRESS

It's one of the moments many brides-to-be look forward to most when organising a wedding: trying on a succession of beautiful dresses while your nearest and dearest 'ooh' and 'ahh', and get helplessly teary-eyed as they sip champagne. But the pressure of finding 'the one' can turn this wonderful experience into a real-life nightmare, so just take your time and stick to your budget, and check out the following pointers to keep you smiling in the bridal shop, rather than crying in the changing room.

RESEARCH

Pinterest, magazines, blogs, websites – there's a whole world of inspiration out there. Look for designs, fabrics, lines and styles of dresses that appeal to you, and then keep a note of these, or if possible take screenshots or cut out images ready to take with you when you visit a boutique.

DON'T OVERWHELM YOURSELF

Once you've explained to the sales assistant what you like and what you don't, he or she will gauge your body type, and with all that information select between five and seven dresses that they believe match your tastes but also accentuate your best assets and hide any areas you're less excited about. Avoid trying on more than ten in one day, as you'll get 'dress blindness' and begin to feel lost. Better to sleep on it, and come back (or go elsewhere) for another session if necessary.

Never say never

No matter what, when it comes to wedding-dress shopping, never do the following: forget to take a pair of heels and a (multiway) bra, ignore your budget (remembering to include alteration and delivery costs), dismiss colours that aren't white/ivory (various hues complement different skin tones), or do it all online (the fabric and fit should be perfect – you can't tell for sure just by looking at a screen). Finally, don't forget to enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime experience!

FINDING A BRIDALWEAR BOUTIQUE

If you've found a dress that you're sure is 'the one', run an internet search to find a stockist near you, call their number, and arrange a time and date to visit. If instead you just have ideas of styles but nothing set in stone, check reviews of the shops in your area or pop in to see if they stock dresses within your budget. If you're happy with what they are offering, make an appointment to ensure that you have the attention of the staff, all to yourselves.

Different cuts of dress

EVERY BODY IS DIFFERENT – LITERALLY – SO HERE'S A GUIDE TO WHAT MAY SUIT YOU

Many brides find that some styles they had their heart set on just don't look right on them, and that's because most people don't have the same body type as the models wearing them in the pictures. If you're particularly tall, petite or plus-size, finding a boutique that caters specifically for your shape will make shopping easier and more fun. In general (and this is not true for everyone), triangle shapes (wider on top than bottom) suit v-neck, scoop or wide neckline styles, and should look for a dress with sleeves (avoiding puffed ones) or consider a bolero jacket. If you carry weight all round, an empire line will draw attention away from your waist and help you to look leaner; or consider a ball-gown style to flatter areas you want to hide. Pear shapes (small shoulders, wider hips) look great in princess-style dresses (tight bodice with big, billowing skirt), and strapless gowns, but should avoid mermaid and tiered looks. To bring curvature to slim bodies, consider dresses with embroidery and beading, as well as adding a sheath underneath, or go for a ball gown with a full skirt, but avoid off-the-shoulder or halter-neck styles. Petite brides should think less is more, with clean contours and A-line styles, whereas ball gowns and mermaid styles may swamp. Tall brides can carry off most styles except for perhaps empire lines, which can fail to flatter. And finally, hourglass figures look best in corset dresses with sweetheart necklines that emphasise a fuller bust, but they may want to steer clear of fuller gowns that can add weight to the lower half. Not every bride will want to wear a dress – choose what you are most comfortable in.

Dress sizes

Typically, it's an accepted fact that wedding-dress sizes come up a little snug, so ignore the label. Most wedding dresses are tailored specifically to your size and height anyway, which is why you want to start shopping around 12 months ahead of time to allow for alterations. Make sure you sit down in the dresses too, as you'll be in it all day so your comfort counts just as much as how it looks.

◇ Record your dress size and measurements here:

◇ Record where you have seen dresses you like:

VEIL VARIETIES

Brides are split on whether to veil or not to veil, as traditionally it symbolises modesty and chastity, with the ‘unveiling’ being the groom’s ‘right’, which many find outdated. Today, it’s thought of more as a fabulous accessory. Fabric and colour aren’t the main considerations here, as they tend to be white net or lace as standard. Instead, it’s all about length. Chic ‘birdcage’ styles range from covering the eyes to just flirting with the jawline, while shoulder length or ‘blusher’ varieties lend a touch of tradition that won’t compete with the dress. For a more dramatic look, ‘elbow length’ veils are an elegant way to conceal shoulders or upper arms, while ‘fingertip’ options cover the hips. Knee-length and ballet/waltz (60-inch) veils add elegance without the weight. Finally, floor-length (70-inch), chapel (90-inch) and cathedral wedding veils (108-120-inch) veils offer romantically powerful silhouettes with differing length and style trains.

KEEP OPINIONS TO A MINIMUM

While bringing a select entourage bridalwear shopping for a second, third or fourth opinion is a good idea, too many opinions may spoil the experience, so consider quality over quantity. It could be your mother, sister, nan or best friend, but just choose a few people who have your best interests at heart, who will tell you the truth no matter what, and who bring an upbeat, positive enthusiasm.

YOU SHOULD GET ‘THAT’ FEELING

It may sound cliché but most brides claim to get a feeling when they find ‘the’ dress. Some say it’s a bit like butterflies, while others say its intuition meets love at first sight, and that when you know, you know. Likewise, if you’re unsure or have any doubts then the dress isn’t for you. Still not sure? Imagine your partner’s face as you walk down the aisle in the dress – if it’s positive then this could be your instincts telling you to go for it.

Accessories

YES, THE DRESS IS THE SHOW STEALER, BUT IT'S ALL THOSE OTHER LITTLE TOUCHES THAT BRING THE LOOK TOGETHER

SHOES

High-heels and stilettos may be gorgeous, but they often offer more in style stakes than comfort, in which case kitten or trumpet heels, ballet pumps, sandals or even flip flops, may be the way to go, especially if your dress is floor length. Whatever you choose, it's important you wear the wedding shoes to the dress fitting to ensure the dress is altered to the correct length.

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JEWELLERY

Tiaras, headbands, hair grips, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, toe rings and even jewelled embellishments for your shoes – while it can be tempting to shower yourself in bling, avoid overdoing it. Pick one or two touches with matching metals that complement the neckline, colour and fabric of the dress.

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LINGERIE

While you may want to break out sexy lingerie for the wedding night, this might not be the most comfortable or supportive/flattering option for the day, so you could consider having two sets, one for each part. Make sure you wear the 'day' lingerie to your dress fitting for accurate alterations.

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HAIR AND MAKEUP

As there are so many styles to choose from, look online and in magazines for inspiration, and find a hairdresser or friend who you trust to create a look that complements your dress and theme. Trial it before the wedding to ensure it lasts all day long. If you're doing your own makeup, speak to the experts at makeup counters and ask for some tips or a makeover. Alternatively, book a professional to come out to you on the day, but be sure to have a trial beforehand to nail down the look you want. Again, choose a style to suit your dress and theme, and pick colours that feature in your wedding if appropriate, otherwise stick to those that complement your tone.

Bridesmaid *dresses*

BRIDESMAID-DRESS SHOPPING SHOULD BE FUN, SO HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO ENSURE IT IS

Deciding on bridesmaid dresses can be more stressful than you anticipate. If you're going to have more than one bridesmaid, it's unlikely they will be the same size and shape, and have the same taste in style, so pleasing them (while remembering it's your day) can be a challenge!

RESEARCH

Grab some scissors and a pile of wedding magazines, and cut out any dresses you like. Alternatively, jump online and bookmark/screenshot your favourites. If you have bridesmaids with varying body types, you might want to consider slightly different styles of the same dress.

PICK A SPECIFIC COLOUR

For many brides, this is the most important factor, as often the colour will complement the chosen theme or other shades featured in the wedding, such as the flowers or groomsmen's ties. To narrow your search, be as specific as possible. For example, if you're thinking of blue, pick a shade: periwinkle, cornflower, sky, navy, royal, marine and so on. When you buy the shoes, consider whether these will be in the same shade or something more neutral.

WHERE TO SHOP

Consider what shopping experience best suits you and your budget. Buying bridesmaid dresses from a bridal shop is likely to cost more, but usually offers a higher quality and better fit. Be aware that alterations can take several months. Buying a bridesmaid 'style' dress off the rail in a department store can save money, but it may be difficult getting all the right sizes in one go, not to mention finding a style that suits everyone. Online shopping has its obvious benefits, but make sure you have everyone's exact measurements. Also, check the estimated delivery date and returns policy.

Hair care

If you have the budget, book the person who is doing your wedding hair to do your bridesmaids' hair too. Research styles that you like that suit the dresses, your theme and your hair, remembering that the hairdos may have to differ slightly if the bridesmaids have varying lengths. If you don't have the budget, pick a style that is fairly easy for the bridesmaids to do themselves (or on each other), and ask them to practise before the big day.

◇ Use this space to record bridesmaids' sizes, preferred styles and potential shops

A little something to say thank you

It's customary for brides to thank their bridesmaids with a small token of their appreciation, and typically this is something they can use on the day. For example earrings, a necklace or a bracelet that complements the dresses you've chosen. Consider an engraving for an extra personal touch. Other ideas could be a clutch or other style of bag, perfume (so you avoid several clashing scents), or monogrammed items such as a dressing gown, slippers or a champagne flute for when you're all getting ready in the morning.

Write down your gift ideas and plans here:

Suits for the groom & his men

HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO TURN YOUR MAN INTO A DAPPER CHAP

There are more options and things to consider than you might realise when it comes to the groom's attire, and it's just as important for his groomsmen to complement him and the overall wedding theme.

HIRE OR BUY

If money is an issue, renting a suit or tux is a great option, because you'll look the part at a fraction of the cost. However, if your budget allows and you know you'll wear the suit again, for example to a formal occasion or for work if you're expected to dress smartly, then buying a high-quality, made-to-measure suit is a fantastic investment that can last a lifetime.

STYLE

The location, venue, season and theme will all have an impact on the style of suit your groom chooses, but generally speaking there are three 'classic' looks to choose from. The first is morning dress, which features a long, formal coat that drops to the back of the knee; or the half morning option that rounds underneath the bottom, paired with a shirt, waistcoat and trousers. For a slightly different style to the morning coat, grooms could go for the equally formal and long tailcoat, and pair it with a top hat. The tuxedo is incredibly formal, but works well in the right venue and with brides wearing ostentatious gowns. Tuxedos are almost always black, and feature a shirt, cummerbund, silk bow tie and trousers. The final, and perhaps most popular modern option, is the three piece suit, which teams a three-button, single-breasted suit jacket, waistcoat, formal trousers without cuffs or pleats, with a French, non-buttoned cuffed shirt, so cufflinks can be used. To suit a more casual theme, grooms can make the look less formal, by forgoing the waistcoat, tie and/or even the jacket.

Accessories

When it comes to ties, a seven-fold is formal yet modern. However, bow ties are becoming popular, in part due to the rise in 'informal' themes, such as vintage and rustic, but also because they're the only choice for a tux. Wedding stylists recommend ditching the belt and instead going for a well-fitted suit. Or, if it matches your theme (vintage, folksy or rustic), lose the jacket and waistcoat in favour of braces. Cufflinks make for a lovely wedding-day gift from the bride-to-be, and are traditionally gold, platinum or silver. If it suits the theme, rose gold, pearl or even types of wood could work.

COLOUR

The most popular colour for a groom's suit is blue, with the hottest shades being cobalt, navy and midnight. Another classic option is grey, either medium or charcoal, and light grey is a popular choice for destination weddings. Black is timelessly elegant and unquestionably formal, but may lack the necessary personality needed for a modern wedding, especially one with a theme. If you're opting for a more 'informal' vibe, such as rustic or folksy, consider brown and beige shades. Shirts are almost always white, and for accessories such as silk-blend ties and pocket squares (or even waistcoats) use a colour that works with the shade of the suit, or use this as an opportunity to unite the men's look with the overall theme of the wedding and/or elements such as the flowers and bridesmaids dresses. If you have a specific colour in mind, give your hubby-to-be a swatch of the exact colour so the shop staff can do their best to match it.

SHOES

Black leather lace-ups are the most formal choice for grooms, typically in the Oxford and Derby styles, which work with most styles of suit, especially those in darker shades such as black and charcoal grey. For a blue suit, look for a medium to dark brown shoe instead.

◇ Use this space to record the suits you like, as well as measurements for the groom and groomsmen

Fabric

For a formal-looking suit, opt for a 100% wool, which is particularly helpful for late autumn, winter and early spring weddings. If you're expecting it to be a warmer day, such as those of late spring and summer, a wool and silk blend may be a better option. For destination or beach weddings, try a linen and cotton blend to stay cool.

A guide to *buying flowers*

ACCENTUATE YOUR THEME AND REVEL IN A HEAVENLY FRAGRANCE OF FRESH FLOWERS

On average couples will spend between £1,200 to £1,500 on flowers for their wedding and ideally should book their selection with a florist at least 6 months in advance. If this cost exceeds your budget, you could attempt to DIY it if you feel confident in the art of flower arranging – just remember to leave yourself enough time to complete the task. Alternatively talk to the local florist and explain what you have to spend, and they should be able to make cost-cutting suggestions, such as swapping some of the more expensive blooms for seasonal or cheaper alternatives, such as peonies for roses, and help you to prioritise your wish-list of arrangements. Here's a guide to what you may want to consider.

BRIDAL PARTY

Traditionally each bridesmaid has an individual but identical bouquet, while the maid of honour's may vary slightly in style. The bride's bouquet should be the biggest and most impressive, perhaps with additional blooms, or with the same flowers in slightly different shades to distinguish it. Top choices include roses, peonies, tulips, calla lilies and lilac. If you want to keep your bouquet but also want to do the bridal toss, be sure to ask your florist for a replica.

GROOMSMEN

The men get boutonnières instead of bouquets, which fit inside their suit's lapel (on the left). Just as with the bride, the groom's creation should be different to those of the groomsmen, and often the best man's boutonnière differs in colour or composition too. Carnations, roses and orchids tend to be the favourite picks.

How to choose

If your budget allows, match the flowers to your theme or colour scheme, such as the palette you chose for the bridesmaids' look. You could select flowers that mean something to you, such as those that featured in the first bunch your fiancé ever bought you, or celebrate your heritage by including yours, his or both of your ancestry with appropriate national flowers. Just talk to the florist and run through your ideas.

DECORATIONS

Floral decorations can be used for the following: altar/ceremonial table, chairs, aisle, candles, entryway, ceiling, arches, wedding breakfast tables, reception buffet, bar, and wedding cake. Generally these are composed of roses, gardenia, peonies, hydrangeas, lilies, orchids and chrysanthemums, and the larger your venue is the more or larger displays you'll need.

My flowers

/ MY FAVOURITE FLOWERS ARE

◇ ______________________________

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/ THE COLOURS I WOULD LIKE IN MY FLOWERS ARE

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◇ ◇ ◇

◇ ◇ ◇

/ WRITE DOWN WHERE YOU WOULD LIKE FLOWERS INCLUDED IN YOUR WEDDING DAY

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/ FLORIST NAME ◇ ______________________________
/ ABOUT ◇ ______________________________
/ COST ◇ ______________________________
/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ______________________________
/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ FLORIST NAME ◇ ______________________________
/ ABOUT ◇ ______________________________
/ COST ◇ ______________________________
/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ______________________________
/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ FLORIST NAME ◇ ______________________________
/ ABOUT ◇ ______________________________
/ COST ◇ ______________________________
/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ______________________________
/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

SILK FLOWERS?

Silk flowers in general are cheaper, less wasteful and are particularly ideal if you're marrying out of season, when many fresh varieties would need to be imported in. If you're planning on creating the arrangements yourself, using silk blooms means you'll have a lot longer to perfect them. Alternatively, hire ready-made fake flower arrangements, which are said to be a quarter to a third cheaper than fresh.

Wedding bands

EVERYTHING YOU'LL EVER NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BUYING WEDDING RINGS

The great thing about rings is that most people can't tell just by looking at one, how much it costs, leaving you free to find the 'one' that's right for you and your budget.

METALS

Typically, the most expensive option on the table is platinum – it's more pure and rare, and won't tarnish or fade. A cheaper, very similar choice is palladium, which is made from the same group of metals as platinum, but is roughly half the price, and a good choice if you have a hands-on job or lifestyle. Gold or white gold (a mix of yellow gold and a white metal alloy such as platinum or, cheaper still, silver) are popular options, while the relative newcomer, rose gold (a mix of yellow gold and copper), lends a touch of romantic elegance. Dark-grey titanium rings make a bold statement and are a great choice for those who want something lightweight or are sensitive to wearing metals. Silver is very malleable, so can feature intricate details and be shaped into elaborate designs. What's more, it's typically the cheapest option, and so shouldn't be discounted by those on a tight budget.

SIZE

To be sure of the right fit, get the sales assistant to take your ring size, but if you're shopping online, just wrap a piece of string or dental floss around your left ring finger so that it's secure but not cutting in, then mark the point where the string meets. Measure the distance in millimetres and use a ring measurement chart to find your correct size.

STYLE

Traditionally, couples choose rings of the same material (and one that complements the engagement ring), with the groom's being slightly wider, and the design being 'plain', as this is considered timeless. In recent years, there's been a rise in popularity for brides' rings to be flourished with patterns, grooves and/or stones (usually diamonds, but also coloured gemstones). 'Enhancer' rings are another increasingly popular option, designed to work with the existing engagement ring, as they slot together seamlessly.

/ WRITE DOWN YOUR RING SIZES HERE:

◇ My ring size is: ____________ ◇ My partner's ring size is: ____________

◇ Use the space below to write about the kind of ring you'd like. Note down any ring shops that you've been to here too:

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Wedding *cake*

HOW TO FIND A WEDDING CAKE THAT IS PERFECT FOR YOUR DAY IN THREE EASY STEPS

A wedding cake used to just be a rich, fruit, three-tiered affair with a layer of marzipan and icing, but long gone are the days of convention, and nowadays you can find cakes in all shapes, sizes and flavours!

◆ STEP 1 ◆

CHOOSE YOUR FLAVOUR

The flavour(s) of your wedding cake should be ones that you both love the most – the day is about you, after all, and this can also extend to any ingredient preferences you have (for example vegan) and intolerances. Chocolate is said to be the flavour most couples opt for, but also in contention for the hotspot are vanilla, lemon and carrot, and the traditional fruit cake still seems to hold a place in many hearts. For flavour-combination inspiration, look online or ask friends or amateur bakers for their advice, as well as contacting local cake creators. Don't be afraid to ask for samples too, as it's vital you try before you buy.

◆ STEP 2 ◆

PICK A DESIGN

A white iced cake with a miniature bride and groom on top doesn't quite cut the mustard (or cake) like it used to, and many couples prefer something that is altogether more original or personalised. You could choose a design that reflects your wedding theme, lifestyle, professions, passions or family setup, or go for something entirely unique. Again, magazines and websites like Pinterest, plus browsing cake creations online will be a huge help.

◆ STEP 3 ◆

SELECT THE SIZE

A 'traditional' wedding cake is made up of three tiers (12-inch, 10-inch and 6-inch), and it's said that the bottom is for eating on the day, the middle tier is shared after the wedding, and the top tier is saved (in the freezer) for your baby's christening (although more recently this has changed to the first anniversary instead). Today, the size of your cake and the number of tiers you go for should depend more on the number of guests you plan to invite, with three 'standard size' tiers typically feeding around 100 guests.

Think outside the (cake) box

A growing number of couples are switching out 'showstopper' cakes for individual creations, such as macarons, cupcakes and even doughnuts. For those who lack a sweet tooth, one of the most popular alternatives is three (or more) wheels of cheese, complemented by a selection of grapes and crackers. As with before, choose flavours that you adore, although a tame option or two for those with less adventurous palettes may be well received, as would information labels.

/ HAVE A GO AT SKETCHING YOUR IDEAL CAKE

/ WHAT ARE YOUR AND YOUR PARTNER'S FAVOURITE FLAVOURS?

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- ◇ ______________________
- ◇ ______________________
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Cake cutting

Historically, the cutting of the cake was done by the bride (to represent the loss of her virginity), but over time it became a two-person job – quite literally – as it's seen as the couple's first task together. Today, the couple just make the first cut, often during the reception, so it can be served as dessert. The band/DJ should announce to your guests when this is about to happen so they can watch and cheer, while the photographer gets those all-important final shots.

Record details and costs for cake-shop options, and take notes at your cake tasting

/ **NAME** ◇ ______________________________

/ **CAKE YOU TRIED AND WHAT YOU THOUGHT** ◇ ______________

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/ **COST** ◇ ______________________________

/ **CONTACT INFORMATION** ◇ ______________________________

/ **ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE?** YES / NO

/ **NAME** ◇ ______________________________

/ **CAKE YOU TRIED AND WHAT YOU THOUGHT** ◇ ______________

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/ **COST** ◇ ______________________________

/ **CONTACT INFORMATION** ◇ ______________________________

/ **ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE?** YES / NO

/ **NAME** ◇ ______________________________

/ **CAKE YOU TRIED AND WHAT YOU THOUGHT** ◇ ______________

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/ **COST** ◇ ______________________________

/ **CONTACT INFORMATION** ◇ ______________________________

/ **ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE?** YES / NO

Food & drink

AS WITH MANY ASPECTS OF YOUR WEDDING, THE REFRESHMENTS YOU CHOOSE CAN BE DRIVEN BY YOUR THEME AND VENUE

You'll find when shopping around for venues that most have a strict in-house catering policy, which means you'll be tied into whatever food they typically prepare. You may be given some say on the menu, but you won't be able to use third-party vendors or bring in your own culinary creations. With this in mind it's a good idea to think about what menu you want. If you have your heart set on a very specific menu or theme, it's a good idea to shop around for venues that are a bit more flexible when it comes to catering. Here's an idea of what to expect, whichever option you go for.

ONE VENUE THAT DOES IT ALL

If you hire a wedding venue, typically part of the package will include the food your guests will be served and often a selection of drinks, but be sure to check exactly what your guests will receive before putting down the deposit. Ideally you would want your guests to receive a welcome drink and canapes on arrival, and perhaps more afterwards if you're heading off with the photographer for a while to take some romantic couple shots. As well as this, you need to think about the wedding breakfast, which is a formal sit-down meal, complete with wine and champagne for the various toasts during the speeches.

If you're having the evening reception at the same venue, cocktails are a fantastic choice to welcome your guests and a buffet is an easy and efficient way to ensure you feed everyone. A platter of sliced wedding cake can be added to the assortment of desserts on offer, and you could even announce an 'open' bar, so your guests won't have to spend a single penny.

As with every element of the wedding, your budget will dictate what you can and can't afford, and so it might not be possible to include all these aspects. The best thing to do is shop around for a venue that includes everything you want within your budget. If you have your heart set on a place but can't afford every element, work your way backwards, eliminating parts that you can stand to lose, for example, an open bar, welcome cocktails at the reception or pre-ceremony canapes, until you have a created a catering package that you love, but more importantly, can afford.

Dietary requirements

When you send out your wedding invitations, be sure to include a request for anyone with any dietary requirements, including allergies and kosher, to notify you as soon as possible, as you'll need to let the catering team know. It's likely you'll also have vegetarians and vegans attending, and so these guests will also need to have a separate menu prepared for them. If you're unsure what any of these guests may prefer to eat, just ask them for suggestions.

Do it yourself

Serving up your own selection of food and drink won't just save you a vast amount of money, but it's also a great option if you want your day to express informality or you want to tailor your menu specifically to your masterminded theme. That said, it will involve a great deal of work – before and on the day itself. With this in mind, it's advisable to rope in as many friends and family members as you can to help cook the food ahead of time and prepare it on the day. In the run up to the big day, sample and perfect your choices, and consider where you'll get the linen, crockery, cutlery and glassware you'll need – will you buy disposable options, loan sets from several friends or hire from a relevant company or the venue itself?

USING EXTERNAL VENDORS

Super-flexible venues that are happy for you to arrange your own food and drink for the day will score highly with those wishing to plan a personalised, unique or strongly-themed wedding. From freelance cocktail companies and street-food vans to ice cream tricycle carts and a hog roast-come-barbeque extravaganza, whatever food you crave, there's usually a company that you can hire to provide it. If this is the way you want to go and you've got approval in writing from the venue, there are a couple of things to bear in mind. As you'll likely be dealing with several people from several different companies, it's a good idea to appoint someone in your wedding party to have ownership of food and drink (if you don't have a wedding planner, that is) as it will require a lot of co-ordinating on the day itself, which you won't have time for. Next, check whether the caterers provide all the linen, cutlery, crockery, and glasses, or if you need to use the venue's supply, which can be an additional cost. The same goes for waiting staff and be sure to check who is responsible for the clean up – again if that's down to you, appoint several helpful members of your party to complete this task.

/ WRITE DOWN A LIST OF YOUR FAVOURITE FOODS AND POTENTIAL DISHES YOU'D LIKE TO EAT ON YOUR WEDDING DAY

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◇ ____

/ MAKE A FEW DIFFERENT SAMPLE MENUS TO DECIDE FROM

Menu

WRITE DOWN YOUR FINAL MENU FOR THE DAY, INCLUDING CANAPES AND ANY OTHER SNACKS AND TREATS

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Invitations

DISCOVER JUST HOW MUCH GOES INTO A WEDDING INVITATION BEYOND ASKING SOMEONE TO COME TO YOUR BIG DAY

For most weddings, the actual invitation is just one part of a collective 'suite' of matching, beautifully designed stationery (usually in keeping with your theme), that you'll send out to your guests. Here's a rundown of what else you should include.

THE INVITATION

Tradition dictates that the mother and father of the bride invite guests on behalf of their daughter, for example: Mr & Mrs John Smith request the pleasure of [guests' names] at the marriage of Miss Jane Doe to Mr Joe Doe. Following this is the location, date, time and if appropriate details of where the reception is being held after the ceremony. Today, many couples have abandoned this custom, and instead invite guests on their own behalf. Alongside the formalities of who, where and when, you may wish to state who is invited (are they allowed a plus one, can they bring their children and so on) and what the dress code is (smart, casual, themed); include a link to your wedding website if you have one; and state what time the festivities will come to a close, usually worded as 'carriages at midnight'.

A MAP

Within the suite, include a sheet with a detailed map with tried and tested instructions, or at the very least make sure that using the postcode through apps like Google Maps will get your guests to the right place. Also add public transport links and phone numbers for local taxi companies, as this will be a boon for non-drivers.

GIFT LIST

Usually the gift-list sheet begins along the lines of: 'Your presence at our wedding is a gift in itself, but if you do wish to buy us something...' followed up with whatever you've decided, be it a gift registry, money towards a honeymoon and so on.

ACCOMMODATION

Another sheet should detail all the appropriate local accommodation options. If you've arranged a room-rate discount with the venue or nearby hotel, be sure to let your guests know here.

RSVP

The final sheet will be an RSVP, which should include a space for the person to write their name, a tick box or delete as applicable 'would love to come / are unable to attend' option, a space for dietary requests, the 'deadline' of when they should let you know by, and a return postal or email address (traditionally one of the parents' residences). If your budget permits, including a self-addressed and stamped envelope is a helpful touch.

IDEAS FOR STATIONERY

MINIMALISM

Moving away from the 2010s' trends of mixed metal, geometric graphics and soft-pastel watercolours, recently there's been a shift towards more simple designs. Think clean lines, black and white shades, only essential information (in a strong, sans-serif font) and confidence with negative space.

BOTANICAL DETAILS

From ferns to tropical palms, there has been a significant surge in the popularity of plant-patterned invitations among millennial couples. Consider using just a few shades of green when it comes to the luscious leaves, as this will add interest; and opt for a clean, white background to help the design pop. Handwritten, calligraphy-style fonts place well here.

SUSTAINABLE

Nowadays many couples are opting for more sustainable materials for their wedding invitations such as eco-friendly recycled or seeded (plantable) paper. Others choose to go fully digital with e-invites or wedding websites.

Save the date

To ensure most of your guests can attend the big day, send out a 'save the date' card (or email/text) as far in advance as possible, as this will buy you some time before the official invitations are designed, printed and sent out. Debut your chosen theme within the card's design, and include your names, the wedding date, the location (or venue if booked), and a little note explaining that a formal invitation will follow.

/ SKETCH YOUR INVITATION

Entertainment

YOUR GUESTS WILL EXPECT TO BE ENTERTAINED, SO HERE ARE SOME TOP TIPS TO KEEP EVERYONE HAPPY

MORE THAN MUSIC

Nowadays, there is so much more to come under the umbrella of 'wedding entertainment' than DJs and bands. You could have a photo booth, a selfie mirror, table party games, casino tables, acrobats, fire breathers, even palm readers… the list is extensive. What's more, entertainment needn't be restricted solely to the evening reception; you could have a choir, an orchestra or a string quartet to serenade during the ceremony; magicians and caricaturists interact with your guests during the formal meal; and how about fireworks or confetti cannons to see your wedding day go out with a bang? Just be sure to check your choice of entertainer with the venue first.

THE NEEDS OF THE MANY

Like all art, music is subjective, and because everyone has different tastes, finding an act to please everyone equally is practically impossible. One option is to simply focus on what you and your partner like – it is your wedding after all. That said, if your tastes are slightly more acquired, it might be kinder to your guests to choose something a little more 'mainstream'. Another option is to make a decision based on your venue or to reinforce your theme.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTING

It's essential to know exactly what you're getting before the big day arrives, and the beauty of social media means you can see your shortlist of entertainers in action without even leaving the house. If you're having a DJ or band, it's advisable to meet up with them beforehand, as you'll want to be sure their personality, style and level of talent is right for the occasion. Ask friends for recommendations, and read reviews and testimonials to determine whether the entertainer is good value for money, professional and reputable.

Iron out the details in advance

Before you book an entertainer, ask them exactly what you can expect in terms of performance and, if appropriate, what their playlist is. Can you edit it with your own requests/vetos? Or even create your own from scratch? Find out how long they entertain for – will they require food and drink? Also, do they have public liability insurance, are their portable appliances PAT tested, and does their fee include travel and/or accommodation?

Your first dance

CHOOSING THE SONG FOR YOUR FIRST DANCE ISN'T AS EASY AS YOU MIGHT THINK

The first dance holds more significance than being a signal for the dancing to start; it is thought to traditionally have been the moment the groom 'shows off' his bride, but in the 21st century this is more of a two-way street. The song doesn't necessarily have to be 'your song', but one that you feel reflects your relationship and personalities, and it can be seen as a message to your guests of how you feel about one another. Try dancing to the song in your home before the wedding to see if it feels right, and be sure to let the DJ know what it is, so they have it on the night, or if you're booking a band give them plenty of advance notice so they can learn to perform it perfectly.

/ LIST SONGS THAT MEAN SOMETHING TO YOU AS A COUPLE

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◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

◇ ______________________________

/ OUR FIRST DANCE SONG WILL BE...

◇ ______________________________

/ ENTERTAINER NAME ◇ ______

/ ABOUT ◇ ______

/ COST ◇ ______

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ______

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

/ ENTERTAINER NAME ◇ ______

/ ABOUT ◇ ______

/ COST ◇ ______

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ______

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

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/ ENTERTAINER NAME ◇ ______

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/ COST ◇ ______

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ______

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

Wedding favours

CHOOSE A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT SOMETHING TO HELP YOU SAY ‘THANK YOU’

Wedding favours are a lovely way of thanking your guests for attending your wedding, in the same way parents tend to hand out party bags to guests after a child’s birthday party. What’s more, as the gifts are usually tagged or even engraved with the recipient's name and presented on the table where they are due to sit at the wedding breakfast, they can double as a personalised place setting.

Wedding ‘thank you’ favours are thought to have started life in the 16th century as a symbol of good luck, with the very rich able to gift guests with a sugar cube, a sign of wealth. Over the years, the sugar-lump custom evolved to ‘bonbonnieres’ (French for a ‘box of sweets’), which typically consisted of five sugared almonds, representing the five blessings of health, wealth, happiness, long life and fertility. Today, sugared almonds are still among the top treats given to guests, but here are some other ideas that you might prefer...

HOMEMADE PRESERVES

Jams, marmalades and chutneys, oh my! Present your chosen treat in a cute jar with a natty fabric cover, and don't forget the name tag.

CAKE CREATIONS

Fancy, multicoloured meringues and marvellous macarons are among some of the top individual treats given to guests, but rather than buy, why not bake?

SWEET TOOTH

Fudge, honeycomb, truffles, retro classics… whatever you fancy, your friends and family are bound to love too. If you really can't decide though, how about opting for a sweet cart instead? Give each guest a bag or jar to help themselves to a tantalising selection.

SOMETHING STRONGER

Serving up a miniature, be it your favourite tipple or a popular spirit such as flavoured gin, rum or vodka, works as a sweet keepsake or an on-the-spot shot.

COASTERS

From slate to silicone, your guests can use these monogrammed mats at your wedding and beyond.

DIY and save

While you may want to give your guests the biggest and best favours Etsy has to offer, the cost might dampen your enthusiasm. To save money, use your (and any willing friends') skills and talents to make your own favours. Baked goods, sweet treats, packets of seeds, lavender bags, wood or textile crafts, hot chocolate/toddy kits, even soap, bath bombs and candles are all gifts you can make at home.

Gift something different

As weddings become bigger and more 'themed', so do the favours. Tie your gifts to the season with sunglasses, flip flops and fans for summer, or bobble hats, hand warmers and even snow globes for winter. For Christmas you could give baubles, for Easter perhaps egg cups, and how about ceramic pumpkin tealight holders for Halloween? If you're environmentally focused, there are totes, eco water bottles and even pot plants. Luggage tags or kitsch local nic nacs are just the ticket for destination weddings; or if your theme is vintage, second-hand books, records or bone china tea cups would work a treat. Vouchers are another great choice, from afternoon tea to adopting an animal – there's something for everyone. Even drinks tokens that can be used at the bar will go down a storm!

/ WRITE DOWN IDEAS AND PLANS FOR FAVOURS

Wedding transport

FROM BEACH BUGGIES TO VINTAGE VESPAS, HOWEVER YOU GET TO YOUR WEDDING, GET THERE IN STYLE!

When it comes to transport the minimum you ought to plan is how the both of you are going to get from home to the ceremony, and from the ceremony to the reception venue. If you're heading to a hotel or off on your honeymoon after the festivities, you'll need transport to get from the reception to your ultimate destination, or if not, a way of getting back home.

NEED A LIFT?

If your budget allows, it's a good idea to consider arranging transport for your wedding party and even shuttle all of your guests to and from the various venues. Not only will this ensure everyone is where they are supposed to be at the right time, but it will ultimately improve the whole experience for everyone involved. The trick is to map it all out on a plain piece of paper, using different coloured pens for the various sets of people who will be travelling together, such as the bridal party, the groomsmen, parents of the couple and guests. Factor in an additional 20 minutes for every journey to be on the safe side.

YOUR TUK TUK AWAITS

The cheapest option for those on a budget is to appoint friends or family members as designated drivers or book taxis, but if money allows why not get a little more creative with your transport? Luxurious cars lend a sense of style and class to the occasion, and you're bound to discover many vendors in your area, but for something more original try thinking out the box. If your theme is vintage, how about an antique car or for those a little more adventurous how about a tandem or hot air balloon? Fairytale weddings could feature a horse-drawn carriage, while adrenaline junkies may like to skydive. Why not consider a sailboat or glamorous yacht for beach side venues? Whatever you go for, just be sure to consider the weather, and perhaps have a back-up plan in case something goes wrong.

Herding guests

A vehicle that holds a larger number of people, such as a coach, works well at weddings, but that doesn't mean it has to be a boring old bus. There are many themed and party coaches that can cater and entertain your guests en route. If you can't transport everyone at once, arrange some entertainment while guests wait, or even organise for drinks and canapes to be served. Likewise, at the other end, greeting your first wave of guests with a cocktail hour or champagne, plus fun activities, such as a photo booth or lawn games, will go down very well.

Get 'the' group shot first

To avoid having hordes of guests waiting around while your photographer shoots the couple and wedding party photos outside the ceremony venue, ask your photographer to take the full ensemble shots and any other large groups first. This means you can send the majority of people on their way to the next venue as the first wave, while you, the wedding party and any close family can take your time getting all the group shots you want while the transport makes its return.

/ WRITE DOWN YOUR IDEAS AND PLANS

/ NAME ◇ ____________________

/ ABOUT ◇ ____________________

/ COST ◇ ____________________

/ CONTACT INFORMATION ◇ ____________________

/ ARE THEY AVAILABLE ON YOUR CHOSEN DATE? YES / NO

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Honeymoon

WITH AN UP-TO-DATE PASSPORT AND ENOUGH PENNIES IN THE BUDGET (OR GUEST-DONATED HONEYPOT), THE WORLD IS YOURS TO EXPLORE

SAFARI SEEKERS

Ideal destination: ***South Africa***

South Africa is a top choice for animal-mad honeymooners. For a touch of luxury, there's Kwandwe – a private 'big five' game reserve with on-site pool-adjacent lodges and fine dining. It's close to the country's famed Garden Route, some 300-kilometre (186-mile) mountain-fringed coastline between the bays of Mossel and Plettenberg. Alternatively, try camping out in Marakele National Park in the heart of the Waterberg Mountains, for a wilderness experience like no other.

CITY SLICKERS

Ideal destination: *Paris*

What better place to spend your first few weeks as a married couple than in the world's most romantic city? History, art, music, fashion, stunning architecture, great cuisine... the French capital has it all. What's more, after you've had your fill of culture, why not take a romantic road trip through the country's wine regions? Burgundy, Bordeaux and the Loire Valley to name but a few, or jet set to a 'nearby' city or two, such as Venice or Vienna, Rome or Riga – there's no shortage of options!

ADRENALINE JUNKIES

Ideal destination: *Tasmania*

After the nerves and thrills of the big day subside, you might be ready for your next adventure, and you'll be hard pressed to find more white-knuckle experiences in one place than on the southern Australian island state of Tasmania. Alongside adventure caving, shark diving and hand gliding, try rafting through ancient Huon pine forests along the Franklin River, or jump into the void from the world's highest commercial abseil – the Gordon Dam.

TROPICAL ESCAPE ARTISTS

Ideal destination: *The Caribbean*

The West Indies archipelago consists of 7,000 white-sand, turquoise-sea encircled islands. Barbados, St Barts and Antigua are all top choices for cosying couples, but it's claimed that St Lucia – with its drive-in volcano, Sault Falls zip lining, rainforests and majestic twin peak world heritage site – is the number-one fan-fave amongst newlyweds.

BEACH BUMS

Ideal destination: *Maldives*

The almost 1,200-island chain, south-west of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, with its platinum-white beaches and sheltered lagoons, is often described as paradise by those who want nothing more than to escape from everyone and everything. November to April is said to be the best time of year to go, and as well as whiling away the hours relaxing on a deserted beach, couples can enjoy snorkelling along coral reefs in addition to kayaking, surfing and fishing.

Before you fly…

Travel insurance – better to buy and not need it than to find yourself thousands of pounds out of pocket. From companies going under to injury and illness, there are so many things that can go wrong, so it's wise to protect yourself financially from every possible eventuality. Vaccinations are the next biggie. With everything from cholera to yellow fever out there, it's essential you check (and are immunised against) all the possible nasties you may meet on your trip. Finally, the name on your passport. The name on your ticket must match that on your passport, so for ease and convenience it's advisable to book the honeymoon beforehand in your maiden name, and don't change your passport until after your trip.

/ WRITE OUT YOUR IDEAL ITINERARY

Supplier *directory*

USE THE NEXT FEW PAGES TO RECORD THE INFORMATION OF ALL YOUR WEDDING SUPPLIERS, FROM CAKE TO FLOWERS AND CARS

/ **COMPANY** ◇ ______________________________

/ **DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE** ◇ ______________________________

/ **CONTACT NAME** ◇ ______________________________

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Section Four

Guests & Gifts

MAKING THE GUESTLIST AND TABLE PLANNING CAN BE SUPER STRESSFUL, SO USE THESE PAGES TO PLAN THEM

Guestlist *planning*

PERHAPS THE HARDEST CONSIDERATION OF ALL – WHO WILL MAKE THE CUT?

QUANTITY OR QUALITY

Some like them big and others prefer small, but whatever size gathering you and your partner have in mind, it's vital to work out just how many people you can actually invite based on your budget. If you can't quite make the funds stretch, there are a few things you can do. One is to opt for a less pricey venue (with a lower price per head) and maintain your wishlist of guests. Alternatively, if the venue is non-negotiable, then the only option is to prioritise your attendees, and make some tough decisions on who makes the cut.

ALL DAY VERSUS EVENING

Another option is to invite those of a higher priority to the wedding itself (meal and all), and then invite those who are less of a priority only to the reception. Traditionally, close friends and family are invited to the wedding. For the reception, you would invite distant relatives, pals of parents, and those not-so-close friends, for example former colleagues, team mates, old uni cronies and so on.

Ts AND Cs

When planning who to invite to your big day, it's a good idea to discuss whether or not your guests can bring their children and whether invitees can bring a plus one. If the answer is 'no' to one or either of these options, it's important to be clear and honest with your guests within the invitation itself, as this could affect their decision on whether to attend. There might be exceptions, for example you might have the budget to include children within your close family but not those of your friends. Just be honest and confident about your decision, and people should understand.

PARTY POLITICS

If you ever hear couples lamenting about how difficult it is to organise a wedding, the most common reason for it will be family and friendship politics. Be it a clash in personalities or a conflict of histories, there's likely to be some form of drama. Ultimately, it's your wedding, and if the people in your life really care about you, they'll want the best for you, which should mean accepting their fate as to whether they make the cut or not. Let them know as early as possible, and remember you can't please everyone. You can't control how other people feel; all you can control are your own emotions, so do what's right for the pair of you, and remind yourself that emotions like guilt and regret are pointless. Feel confident in the decisions you make, and others will do too.

Plan for 100%

One of the most embarrassing faux pas a couple can make is having to uninvite people because they assumed not everyone would be able to attend, and – surprise surprise – everyone can. It's far better to invite your wishlist of guests whom you've budgeted for and assume they will all say yes. That way, if anyone can't come you can invite people from a backup list.

Drawing the line

You have to draw the line somewhere, especially if your budget demands it. Other ways of whittling down your list are: to only consider people you've seen or heard from in the past six months; to only include those you see in your day-to-day lives; or to segment your list into three – your family, your partner's family, and friends – and set an equal number of guests for each group.

/ DRAFT YOUR GUESTLIST HERE

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/ WRITE YOUR FINAL GUESTLIST HERE. TICK THE BOX IF THEY'VE CONFIRMED THEIR ATTENDANCE

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/ DO ANY GUESTS HAVE ANY DIETARY REQUIREMENTS?

The perfect *table plan*

PLAN THE IDEAL SEATING ARRANGEMENT IN JUST A FEW SIMPLE STEPS

Whether your wedding will be big and bougie, or small and intimate, a table plan not only lends an acceptable touch of pomp and ceremony to the occasion, but installs a quiet sense of order that will help things to run smoothly. Your guests won't have to panic about where they will sit, and the servers will know exactly where to deliver dishes made with special dietary requirements in mind.

TOP-TABLE TRADITION

If you're both fans of tradition and get along with your in-laws to-be, your top table (according to British style) is usually set out in a straight line. It typically runs in the following order (from left to right as your guests will view it): maid of honour, groom's father, bride's mother, groom, bride, bride's father, groom's mother, and then the best man. However, as family dynamics have long since changed since the top-table structure was first invented, you should feel free to shuffle the arrangement as you see fit, not to mention incorporate other important figures in your lives, such as step-parents, grandparents, siblings, children and other members of the wedding party. When it comes to choosing where everyone else sits, typically the rule of thumb is the closer you are to the guests emotionally, the closer they should sit to you (the top table) physically.

MIX OR MATCH

For most weddings, the formal meal typically lasts for two to three hours, so it's important to spend a little time and thought deciding what combination of guests will sit together. You could sit friends and 'groups' together, but then you may lose the opportunity for people to integrate, which can help to relax and energise the overall atmosphere of the wedding. On the other hand, forcing people to mingle with 'strangers' can lead to stilted conversations and awkwardness. The best path therefore might be to strike a balance – put some people from one group with some people of another group.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

While it's good to mix your guests a little, it's also wise to sit people together based on some sort of commonality, be it profession, interests or perhaps easiest of all, age. With that in mind, a lot of couples-to-be choose to put all the children on one table together, as it's an effective way of keeping them entertained.

Round or rectangular

Round tables are perfect for weddings, because it means no one is left out and you can sit male and female guests alternately if you choose. Rectangular tables are another popular option, with the seating plan often seeing couples sitting opposite one another. Speaking of tables, don't forget your cake deserves a table all of its own!

Table plans and names

To add a flash of fun to the proceedings, many couples name the tables rather than number them. They often base the names on a theme or something that reflects their love story, personalities or preferences, and create a seating display to match. So for example, if you're a well-travelled couple, each table name could be a destination you have visited, with the table plan being a map of the world and each table a luggage tag (with the list of names) pinned to the corresponding place.

Place cards

The design, font and even the place-card holder are all wonderful opportunities to introduce some creative flair and, if possible, reinforce your theme. For example, if your theme is woodland you could use pine cones, or if it's coastal based, try shells or driftwood to display your guests' names. Make sure the font is clear and readable, as it will also help your serving staff. You'll want to make sure they have a copy of the seating plan too, with added notes under each name for dietary requests and allergies.

/ DRAFT YOUR TABLE PLAN HERE

Gift tracking

AFTER ‘I DO’ COMES THE TIME FOR ‘THANK YOU’…

Although it might seem like way off into the future, there will come a day after the confetti has settled, when you sit down to write the (potentially hundreds of) thank-you notes. To make the whole process unequivocally easier, there are a few tricks for staying on track.

USE AN APP

Multiple wedding apps offer a bundle of ways to see your big day go off without a hitch, helping you to create guest lists, table plans and so much more. Many will also enable you to manually record what each guest gives you, simply by recording the item next to the sender’s name and address on the guest list you created earlier.

USE A REGISTRY

If you have a wishlist of presents as long as your train, the best thing to do is to sign up to a gift registry, and either pop along to the store or use their online facility to record everything you desire. Many brands offer this service, from John Lewis to Selfridges, and even Amazon. There are dozens of specifically designed apps that enable you to cherry pick across hundreds of different high street and independent outlets. The good news with a registry is that you can retrieve a list of who bought what after the wedding – perfect for when you need to pen those thank-you notes.

HONEYPOT FOR A HONEYMOON

Weddings are an expensive business. After the big day, there often aren't the funds left to jet off on a romantic holiday for two, which is why many couples ask guests to donate to a honeypot rather than buying a physical gift. There are many websites (for example www.flyustothemoon.com or https://www.buy-our-honeymoon.com and so on) that offer this as a professional gift service. All you do is simply sign up and choose from a list of things you'd like your guests to give you, so aside from contributing to the flights or hotel, you could add on requests for a helicopter ride, a couples' massage or even a few cocktails, so people of all budgets can feel they've helped towards your happy honeymoon adventure. As with gift registries, you can find out who got you what, plus any personal messages that they included.

Honeyfund a new home

Just as guests can contribute to honeymoons, couples can also use facilitating websites to enable people to gift money towards their new home (for example Honeyfund Home Builder). Guests can contribute money towards anything from the down payment to plants for the front porch, again making it ideal for those with any budget. Alternatively, you could start a GoFundMe page or open a new savings account, which would list the names of all the people who had contributed, making it simple for knowing who to thank later.

Charity begins at weddings

Some couples will say they don't want anything, only the pleasure of the guests' company, and while that may be true, people will still want to get you something. If this is truly how you feel, you could suggest guests make a donation to a charity of your choice, or ask them to sponsor something of your choosing, such as rainforest trees or outback koalas for example. Many charities offer a facility for wedding donations so you know who to thank later. Just add the details of where to donate on your invitations.

/ LIST THE GIFTS YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN AND WHO YOU RECEIVED THEM FROM. TICK THE BOX IF YOU HAVE SENT A THANK-YOU NOTE

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Section Five

On The Big Day

YOU'VE DONE IT! EVERYTHING IS PLANNED AND READY – MAKE SURE YOU DON'T FORGET ANYTHING BY USING THESE PAGES TO MAKE FINAL LISTS AND REMINDERS

Readings and music *for the ceremony*

JUST AS THE LATE, GREAT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE OBSERVED, "IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE, PLAY ON"

Art is a wonderful way to express emotion and feeling, which is why ceremonies feature readings and music. Here are a few things to consider:

HOW MANY SONGS?

Generally speaking, for the ceremony itself, couples typically select four songs or pieces of music: one for the bride and her party's entrance (the processional), two songs to be played during the signing of the register, and a final song as you exit the ceremony as a married couple (the recessional). Just check with your venue to discover how many they suggest (or allow).

HOW SHOULD THE MUSIC BE PLAYED?

The easiest and perhaps most affordable option is to inform the event manager at the venue which songs you want at which moment, so they can queue the tracks ready for the right moment (those venues less equipped with modern music setup might ask for the songs on a CD). If your budget allows, you could book musicians to perform your requested music, or if you have gifted friends who can play or sing, perhaps you could ask them to perform. String quartets, harpists and pianists are the most popular choices to perform at ceremonies, but choose something you enjoy, or even what suits your theme if you have one, for example steel drums, a gospel choir or a big brass band.

WHO SHOULD PERFORM A READING?

Readings during the ceremony are optional, and aren't for everyone, particularly those keen on wrapping things up as speedily as possible. For those who would like a reading or two, there seem to be two schools of thought on who should perform the reading: one option is to ask one or two members of the bridal party, so the maid of honour for example, particularly if they are not doing a speech later. The other school of thought is that it should be someone close to you who is not in the wedding party, so it acts as a nod to how important that person is, for instance your son or daughter, your favourite aunt, the groom's mother, or a close friend who isn't a bridesmaid or groomsman because you decided to just choose family members for these roles.

Which songs should I choose?

The songs you pick should resonate with you as a couple (for example the song you first danced to), rather than music that simply pleases your guests. Generally, there are no rules (unless your venue stipulates otherwise), but if you're having children (and also older members of your family) at your wedding, it's best to avoid anything with explicit lyrics.

What should the reading be?

The reading is entirely your choice, as long as the venue approves it. Or you could leave it up to the person performing it to choose what they read. It could be anything from an apt poem to a relevant section of a book, or even the lyrics to 'your' song. As long as it's romantically charged or refers to the sentiment of being together forever, you'll find something that lends itself to the occasion.

/ WRITE YOUR IDEAS HERE

Photographer shot list

MEMORIES FADE, BUT THE PHOTOS WILL LAST FOREVER

BRIDAL/GROOM PREP

The early photographer catches the shots. Most photographers like to arrive first thing in the morning while the bride is getting ready with her bridesmaids for the ‘bridal prep’ images. They will often use this time to capture shots of things such as the wedding dress hanging up, the rings, the bouquets, shoes and the jewellery. If possible, they may also visit the groom with his best men if nearby, or this is where having two photographers (who work together) is a bonus, albeit more expensive.

THE CEREMONY

The photographer will capture images of the bride arriving at the ceremony, be it by car to a church or down an ornate staircase from her room to the ceremonial hall in a hotel. You should expect the ceremony images to include all the key moments from the 'first look' to the recessional confetti shots and everything in between.

COUPLE AND GROUP SHOTS

While your guests indulge in some refreshments, you can spend a little time with the photographer getting those hang-on-the-wall, romantic couple pictures, and pull aside those you want to appear in group shots. Before the wedding breakfast, the photographer should grab some candids of your guests mingling.

THE WEDDING BREAKFAST

The speeches can make for some great candids, whether of those giving the toasts or the guests and your reactions. No one wants to be photographed while eating, so often photographers will use this break to capture some of the little details you've put so much thought into, such as the place settings, favours, decorations, cake, table plan and so on, as well as shots of the venue itself.

THE RECEPTION

Later at the reception, the photographer should capture candids of you and your guests, hopefully dancing and having a fantastic time, as well as the key moments such as the first dance, the bouquet and garter toss, and the cutting of the cake.

What to expect

As every photographer is different and has their own style, it's important to run through what images you can expect to get before agreeing to book the photographer. You could even describe (or show using magazine or online images) all the types of shots you want. It's also wise before the big day to walk around the venue(s) with the photographer so they (and you) get an idea of where certain shots could be taken, planning for both sun and rain (and backup locations).

Post-photography shots

The photographer will usually leave after all the key reception shots are taken, so many couples employ the services of photo booths. These usually provide all manner of dressing-up accessories, and you and your guests receive copies of the shots. Another option is disposable cameras, or if you're a gadget guru there are instant-print digital cameras, with guests adding the prints to a guest book or real-time evolving piece of artwork, such as a wedding tree, picture bunting or a large frame, as the evening progresses.

/ USE THIS SPACE TO MAKE A LIST OF THE IMAGES THAT THE PHOTOGRAPHER MUST CAPTURE

Itinerary

> Use this space to write down your full itinerary for the day. Start with what time you'll get up, have breakfast and when you'll start getting ready.

To do list

> Make a list of everything you need to get done on the day. Does someone need to collect the flowers? Or visit the venue early? Write everything down, then delegate each job to someone.

Wedding day essentials

> Write down a list of everything you need with you on the day, whether it's your something borrowed or something blue. Include a list for your other half too. Who has the rings?

Reflection

> Congratulations! You're married and hopefully your wedding was everything you wanted it to be. Take some time to relfect on your favourite moments of the big day here...

From saying 'Yes' to 'I do' – everything you need to plan the perfect day

Wedding
JOURNAL

Planning a wedding is fun — you get to make the day how you always dreamed it to be. However, it can also be very stressful and overwhelming. Use this journal to jot down your ideas, make plans, get organised and make sure every detail of your day is perfect for your partner and you. We'll help you to identify your priorities, find your perfect venue, dress, rings and more. Stay on top of important dates and appointments and keep supplier information all in one place. From to-do lists to guest lists – we've got you covered.

Digital Edition

FOURTH EDITION

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